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# **Pupil Voice in PE and the desire for (in)visibility**

D Littlefair

PhD

2021

# **Pupil Voice in PE and the desire for (in)visibility**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of  
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for the degree of  
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Research undertaken in the  
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences  
School of Social Work, Education and Community  
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## **Abstract**

The importance of children is a universally accepted concept in schools. Their rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). However, do we actually listen to what children have to say? Rudduck and Fielding (2002, p.2) argue that the voices of pupils are 'silent' or 'silenced'. The purpose of this research was to listen to and hear the voice of pupils, regarding PE, in two schools in the north east of England. PE is a curriculum subject where there are few pupil voice studies, and what does exist tends to focus mainly on girls and state schools. This study incorporated girls, boys, an independent school and a state school. It involved 154, 14-16 years old pupils across the two schools. The aim of the study was concerning their experiences in PE, with the direction of the study being driven by pupils and thereafter following the issues that they raised.

A phenomenological approach was utilised as the study is about how pupils feel which can be individual and/or shaped by group interaction. A focus group in each school (6 pupils per study) drove the direction of the study which then sort breadth through a questionnaire to the whole year group in both schools (154 respondents) and finally depth through 12 individual interviews. Using the Braun and Clarke (2006) method of analysis, 5 themes emerged from the data, those being Choice, Participation, Pressure, Development and Ability, and Health. A theoretical framework was selected post findings to ensure that it best represented the emergent data. Social field theory was applied as an interpretative mechanism to explain and understand events, actions and behaviours.

Through this Pupil voice method, it emerged that pupils have vastly different experiences in the PE lesson. For some it is that of humiliation and censure, and for others it is about success and achievement. The uniqueness of the lesson with regard to physique and the exposure of both skill and body can affect this duality, negatively and positively. There are adverse consequences for deleterious experiences upon participation and health. The latter being something normally associated with PE for positive connotations. This can lead to the desire for or coerced (in)visibility for many pupils. Solutions from pupils, at both ends of the ability spectrum, to counter issues in PE involved giving choice of activity and having ability setting for classes.

The findings from this research have implications regarding how PE is structured and delivered in schools. It also demonstrates the benefits of an authentic Pupil Voice approach and the subsequent insight that pupils can bring to policy and practice in schools.

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2017 with a subsequent amendment granted on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 93,134 words (within 10% tolerance).

Name: David Littlefair

Signature: *D Littlefair*

Date: 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021

# Chapter 1. Introduction

‘it’s a moral outrage’ (Frank, IS)

This study is about children. It explores the thoughts, feelings, opinions, perspectives and experiences of children in physical education (PE) settings in two secondary schools: an independent school and a state school. The research process is one of pupil voice with direction and findings derived from the pupils and led by their thoughts. The process is equally as important as the outcomes of the study as it authenticates such outcomes. Therefore, throughout the study it was essential to mitigate influences of adult voice to ensure as authentic pupil voice as possible. There is a trade-off, due to the fact that this study represents a thesis for a PhD, therefore as the author, I have to construct a research pathway, make decisions and adjudicate the process, which reflects my adult voice. Other adult voice application is used if it aids justification of methodological approach or substantive topic and also if it helps interpret pupils’ feelings, opinions and experiences, but if it does not, then it is not included. The aim of this study is for the issues that emerge to be their true voice unfettered, although interpreted, by adult voice.

## 1.1 Why Pupil Voice?

### *1.1.1 Importance of Pupil Voice*

Pupil voice is important, and pupils have something to say. The quote in this chapter heading alone demonstrates this and shows why pupil voice is important. No child should feel that any lesson in school is ‘*a moral outrage*’.

Pupil voice can be used as a mechanism to reposition pupils in reform and research in education (Cook-Sather, 2015). It is becoming more common in general school-based research (Bloement et al, 2020), although not necessarily so in PE where it can be limited to certain groups, such as girls. Unfortunately, voice engagement can be seen as tokenistic among pupils (Thomson, 2011; Robinson and Taylor, 2013; Jopling and Riordan, 2021). One reason for this could be that in some instances, pupil voice can be used in a manipulative manner by teachers to do things their way (Fielding 2004a; Fielding, 2004b; Lodge 2005; Thomson and Gunter, 2006). However, ensuring authentic pupil voice can be challenging with Fielding (2004a) asserting that teachers and pupils can never be equals or genuine partners.

Conventionally, many pupil voices are ‘silent or silenced’ (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002, p.2) and have been silent throughout their lives since the inception and evolution of schools (Giroux, 1992; Arnot et al, 2004). Nevertheless, listening to pupils can indicate what is dysfunctional in schools (Symth, 2016) and it can be transformative for teaching (Freire, 1990; Shor 1992). Voice is also an important mechanism to counteract both exclusion and discrimination in Education (Banks 1996; Nieto, 2000). Children have a rich experience (Holdsworth, 2001) and

adults cannot know what children are experiencing, thinking and feeling better than they can (Hall and Martello, 1996). They make sense of life in their terms rather than adult terms (Shotter, 1993) and they are best place to give an insight into their experiences and the dynamic of a PE class setting.

In PE there are few pupil voice studies. Many studies involve pupils, but the topic of research is set by adults and not driven by pupils. Where there is pupil voice, studies they tend to be small and focus upon girls in state school PE. Part of the gap where this research contributes to knowledge is pupil voice in PE for both boys and girls, with the process of authentic pupil voice allowing pupils to drive the areas of the study and express their feelings and experiences on, and in, their terms.

### ***1.1.2 Authentic Pupil Voice***

Authentic pupil voice and its application in this study is considered in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3. However, I would like to briefly outline the parameters deployed regarding pupil voice to give a clear understanding of the rigour applied throughout the research to enable authenticity.

Authentic pupil voice involves creating circumstances where pupils are able to express their true opinions which are not influenced by adults, peers or the situation. They need to be in an environment in which they are comfortable and feel safe and secure with associated empowerment necessary for them to express their true thoughts, feelings and opinions. In this study, this involved creating a relaxed and supportive environment and reassuring the pupils that whatever they said was 'right', as well as agreeing respect and confidentiality within the group (and anonymity outside the group). Distancing myself from the school, and the teachers from the research, was also critical to help the pupils feel they could be candid with their opinions.

Limiting all forms of adult voice was crucial to prevent influence upon the pupils and myself. Therefore, teachers were not involved in the study, all I knew about the schools came from the pupils (see section 1.4) and the findings informed the literature review and theoretical framework rather than being the other way around as is more traditional.

Therefore, in this study, authentic pupil voice is about children in their own real-life situation(s) as told by them.

## 1.2 Why PE?

### *1.2.1 The importance of PE and sport to the nation*

The UK is a nation of sports enthusiasts, many people follow a sport and 16 million people aged 16 years and over participated in sport at least once a week in England during the year up to September 2016 (Sport England, 2016a). Although this is an impressive figure, the population of England is 56 million (Worldometer, 2020) so this does suggest many people are not involved in any form of sport. This, of course, does not mean they are not physically active as they may walk for instance, but it does indicate that there could be a lot of people not involved in exercise.

The benefits of exercise for the health of the nation and the individual can be immeasurable. Warburton et al (2006) found that evidence for a link between physical activity and the prevention of chronic illness and premature death was irrefutable. There also seems to be a linear relationship between physical activity and health status (Warburton et al, 2006). The Government views PE in schools as key to its health strategy (Great Britain, 2015) and thus PE is a major focus in the government's health and obesity agenda. Sports premium funding is one demonstrable aspect of this support for PE (in primary schools) to improve facilities and provision (HM Government, 2020a). This funding commenced in March 2013 and £320m has been allocated for 2020/21 (ibid). Positive early learning experiences of physical activity are critical to lifelong participation (Kirk, 2005), so engaging children in schools is not only critical to this strategy but potentially crucial to the future health of the individual.

It is not only in health where PE and sport can benefit the nation, it can also play a role in economics (Sanderson et al, 2000). Physical activity and sport add £39 billion to the economy (Sport England, 2020). This includes purchases such as trainers, tickets for games, memberships as well as job creation, relieving pressure on healthcare and reducing crime (ibid).

Sport is a passion for many people and elite sport success is important to a nation (Brown, 2015a), which has been recognised by governments around the world. It gives a sense of national pride, a psychological boost to the nation, a unifying factor and can also be known to enhance productivity (Maennig & Porsche, 2008; Kavetsos and Szymanski, 2010). The UK Government recognises the importance of sporting success as is demonstrated with lottery funding for elite athletes and investment in grassroots sport (Sport England, 2016b). National sports bodies are also taking a more active role in participation and development (Sotiriadou and Shilbury, 2009; Great Britain, 2015).

The economic aspect to PE and sport, including the big business and revenue streams associated with sport, the health benefits, elite development and the feelgood factor of sporting success, demonstrates why it has a growing sense of importance. This growing status is evident in the UK with, as already mentioned, money set aside through

the sports premium to enhance PE in schools and the policy towards developing elite athletes (Croston, 2013). However, the importance of the experience of young people (Prochaska et al, 2003; Kirk, 2005) does spotlight the critical role of PE in schools, which is experienced by all pupils and for some is their only encounter with physical activity during their formative years.

### ***1.2.2 PE in schools***

Although some children are involved in sports clubs, the only mass participation in sport for all children is the PE lesson in school and for many children this is the only involvement with physical activity (Lines, 2007). It can be argued that PE is different from sport (Croston, 2013), but that is not the subject of this debate. This study will work on the premise that PE in school is for the majority of pupils, both their first introduction to, and only sustained involvement in, physical activity and sport.

Contrasting school subjects, the differences with the subject of PE places it in a unique position (Fishburne & Hickson, 2001). It has never really reached the status of core subjects which tend to be seen as having greater importance (Hardman & Marshall, 2000). There are many reasons advocated for the importance and purpose of Physical Education (PE) in schools. Although at times in the past it was quite marginalised, its inclusion in the National Curriculum in 1988, the dawn of accredited routes through GCSE, A level and BTEC leading to degrees in sport science, sports management and coaching has raised the status of PE (Houlihan and Green, 2006; Hardman 2008).

For many people the only time they have ever taken part in physical activity was at school and this is their defining memory of participation. Given some of the issues regarding school PE in conjunction with development needs (Baker et al, 2003; De Bosscher et al, 2006; Sotiriadou and Shilberg, 2009) and ability identification (Evans, 2004; Croston, 2013) has enthusiasm and motivation been lost by some pupils during this school period? From a governmental point of view, encouraging a healthy lifestyle is central to their health policy and the sustainability of the NHS (Great Britain, 2015). School PE can play a large part in this drive to improve health as it is the only physical activity for some pupils (Trudeau and Shepard, 2005; Lines 2007) with only 17.5% of children currently meeting the Chief Medical Officer's physical activity guidance (PHE, 2020). Therefore, as the only physical activity for some pupils, PE can play a significant part in creating enthusiasm for engagement with sport and physical activity in childhood (Lines, 2007; Elliot et al, 2013).

PE tends to be one of few subjects where pupils get instant feedback on their ability. For example, pupils know if they cannot get the basketball in the hoop or hit the hockey ball with the stick. They know if they are faster or slower

than their peers and the major problem is so does everyone else - instantly. At least in maths their peers cannot necessarily see they are struggling on a particular question, and it is only really the teacher who knows how many they got wrong on last night's homework, yet in PE it is there for all the world to see. This can lead to negative feedback and name calling by peers who either deem themselves more able or want to deflect criticism away from themselves (Lauritsalo et al, 2015). The resultant effect on self-esteem is quite obvious (ibid).

By the nature of secondary education, PE teachers have been successful in their subject. Therefore, they are able in the subject they teach and if someone is good at something it can be harder to understand someone struggling in that task. PE teachers in secondary schools are good at PE so this could make them less able to understand pupils who struggle and could cause a tendency to focus upon the more able (Evans, 2004; Hay and MacDonald, 2010b).

Thus, given all these potential benefits but equally issues in school PE, is it a good environment and a bedrock for the development of young people?

### ***1.2.3 Definition of PE***

There is a debate in sporting and PE theory about the difference between PE and sport (Penney and Chandler, 2000). However, this study is not about that debate. PE in this study encompasses all forms of physical activity including sport and other leisure pursuits such as the gym and dance. When sport is referred to it is mainly, but not exclusively, representing PE outside of school so as not to get confused with the PE lesson in school, which is a standard terminology for the subject in school. However, PE and sport can blur in the minds of children, so there are no fixed boundaries, rather this definition is a guide. If pupils are referring to extra-curricular physical activity in school outside the PE lesson, such as sports' teams, then that is made clear at the relevant point.

## **1.3 Why a State School and an Independent School?**

The study is about children in their real situations in PE in their schools. Therefore, how many pupils and in what setting could be quite arbitrary, as the voice of one pupil in one setting is important. The reason two schools were chosen, and the nature of these schools, was to encompass breadth and subsequent range of experience.

The schools in this study are both situated in the North East of England, an area where traditionally sport has high importance. Independent schools can have a prowess for sporting achievement, however they are very rarely part of any study on PE in schools. Therefore, as part of the gap in knowledge on PE in schools it was critical to have an independent school involved in the study.

The independent school (IS) that took part in the study is boys only and this adds to the breadth of the academic debate as although there are not many pupil voice studies in PE, where there are studies, they tend to be about girls and state schools. Therefore, including a boys' independent school increases voice from a group that tends to be overlooked and is certainly underrepresented.

In order to encompass a range of experiences to enhance breadth of study and contrast with the independent school, it was essential to involve a state school in a socially deprived area. The state school (SS) was chosen due to the social deprivation factors of the area as the experiences of pupils in such a school could contrast with those of an independent school and therefore offer a broad range of experiences. This school was mixed gender, so it brought the experiences and views of girls into the study.

Older secondary school children (14-16 years old) were requested to take part as they have been through the PE experience and are nearing the end of the system. They have experienced the whole voyage and are of an age when they will be more able to reflect upon their journey and experiences.

Although pupils were situated in contrasting environments and were of different genders, the study is about children, so much of the data and subsequent analysis were undertaken as a collective of pupil voice in the study. However, if gender or type of school gave a particular significant insight then the data was disaggregated.

## **1.4 Knowledge of Schools**

All the information known about the schools depicted throughout this study is from what the pupils said in the focus groups, questionnaire and interviews. I did not ask any adult anything about the schools and did not try to find anything out myself as that would be adult voice and all I wanted to hear was pupil voice. For practical and process purposes I needed some limited prior knowledge, but I was only aware of the designations of the schools (i.e., independent and state), the gender mix in the state school and single gender independent school, the social deprivation levels of the school areas, the year groups involved and the number of pupils in the year groups. I also knew that the focus groups featured a range of abilities and interviews featured pupils who were high and low ability as determined by the school, but I did not know who was in each category and only became aware if the pupils self-identified. Due to the state school being an academy, I knew neither school had to follow the national curriculum, whether they did or not was not the issue, the fact that they had the flexibility not to, was the critical factor. Although, I realise this flexibility is a complex issue, it is less so for non-accredited PE and thus would enable them to offer a curriculum based upon the outcomes of pupil voice in this study should they so wish. The adults in the



project were never involved in the research but they were the gatekeepers for access and the conduits to facilitate the research and I am grateful to them for that. However, that was the extent to their involvement, thus the entire perspective of both schools came from the pupils involved in the study.

## **1.5 Creation of knowledge**

The knowledge created from these findings is indicative of the perceptions of young people regarding PE across their school settings. It showcases the voice of young people in the regional context. It attempts to highlight solutions or issues should school curricula/pedagogy seek to establish or build upon such findings and it contributes to the wider debate about the purpose, effects, environment and benefits of PE in schools. Originality is a key feature of the design of the study bringing together the experience and knowledge of the pupils in a process driven by their voice from the outset, with subsequent emergent themes directly related to their voice.

## **1.6 My interest in the field and motivation for the study**

My interest in this area is threefold. Primarily, I believe children are important and should be at the centre of education and learning. Therefore, the experiences they have in all subjects and the environment they learn in should be positive, supportive and individually motivational. Pupil voice, in my opinion, is the best mechanism to ascertain how they comprehend such experience and environment.

Secondly, I enjoy sport. I like to watch sport live and on TV, experiencing the excitement, thrill and being a Sunderland AFC fan, the constant let-down and disappointment! Although, I have not participated in organised sport since university days, bar an odd kick about or five-a-side game, I did qualify as an FA Coach level 1 and ran a junior football team for a while. I implemented a policy of equality with all abilities welcome and all children playing the same amount of time, as to me these are children and should be treated as such. However, due to results being negative, lots of pressure grew from surrounding adults, such as parents. I did not understand this particularly well as it was about participation rather than winning in my mind, however the sector does not reflect this view. It seemed that adults drive a quest for winning and see players not as children but more akin to premier league players. I did not see the youth football sector as one where all children could develop and thrive.

Finally, as a pupil myself, ‘*a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...*’ (Star Wars, 1977), my favourite lesson of the week was PE. I desperately looked forward to it each week, however it could be terribly spoiled with the words, ‘*right lads, it’s cross-country this week*’. I hated cross-country (as did my peers), it was gruelling, individual, having no interaction with peers (some of whom would cheat) and would involve the steepest and longest bank ever seen for the last mile on return to the school. I did not see the value of this form of PE at all, to me it was a waste of such an

exciting lesson, so it was a double blow, being gruelling and robbing me of the enjoyment of ‘proper’ PE. The irony of all of this is the only form of PE that I take part in today is distance running. For many years I believed that I was incapable of cross-country running following the hated experience of my youth. It was not until September 2019, starting off with an organised council ‘couch to 5k’ course that I have learned how to run distance, through small steps, to the point that I enjoyed it. That was quite a revelation to the extent now, that I regularly run 5k or 10k and look forward to it. My progression did not influence me in wanting to research the topic as I had commenced my PhD a few years prior to returning to running. However, the study inspired my journey and helped me live and embody many aspects of what the pupils were telling me which aided my understanding and interpretation of their voice.

My motivation for the study is simple. Children should not suffer through learning, such as being excluded or left on the side lines, as I witnessed in youth football. They should be supported and the only way to find out if this is the case is through their voice. They have a voice, are competent and know the reality of their situation more than adults do. In my practice as a teacher/lecturer I have the learner at the heart of the process and value their voice(s) which give all a better learning experience. Therefore, my purpose is to ensure pupils are central to all aspects of this study and to let their voice(s) be heard.

## **1.7 Aim and Scope of Research**

This study ascertains the perspectives of young people in the state and independent secondary school sectors regarding their views and experiences of PE and to a lesser degree sport outside school.

For some pupils, PE in school and sport outside of school can be a continuum so it was important to include this to compare and contrast experiences in both spheres. Although the original scope of the study expected to discover experiences of pupils in PE in school and sport outside school with parity, the latter became more of a periphery issue as the research progressed with pupils focusing more and more upon issues in school PE and less about outside school. That was the direction chosen by the pupils so that is indicative of the stories they wanted to tell. This is possibly because school PE was their one unifying shared experience whereas outside of school sport would not be applicable to the majority of children and the environment of those who did take part could be diverse. Sport outside of school is still mentioned to a lesser degree but the main focus is PE in school.

This research applied a phenomenological approach to scope the experiences, perceptions of the purpose and usefulness of PE and sport from the perspective of young people. It examined the experiences, views and attitudes of pupils in a state school and from an independent school and was led by and represented pupil voice throughout. I did consider a participatory research methodology to engage with their voice, but I felt this approach would require more

time and input from the pupils at a crucial point during their GCSE classes. Given this is a PhD thesis, I also felt that in itself would constrain the participatory approach as I would need to demonstrate the academic acumen in design of the study. Therefore, I decided the most appropriate way to capture authentic pupil voice was a phenomenological methodology with a pupil voice method (see Chapter 3).

The study is based upon two focus groups featuring 12 pupils in total, a questionnaire of 154 pupils and an individual interview with 12 children focusing upon their experiences of PE and sport. Focus groups were used in both schools to enable the pupils to drive the research and therefore ascertain the key issues for pupils in their experiences of PE. This was then broadened out to encompass the whole year group through a wider questionnaire of views from pupils, which gave a breadth of experiences. The study then interviewed individual pupils, who volunteered to give their own story of their experience, adding a depth to the findings. All pupils involved did so on a voluntary basis with an ethical stance of their informed consent supplemented by that of their parents prior to engagement.

All children are important. The views of these children are crucial to inform the debate not only about the pedagogy, curriculum and experience of the PE class but also the emotional impact that participation has upon them. This study provides an insight into experience and perspective of young people regarding PE and sport in the context of the modern era with sport's high profile, health agenda, commercial providers and increased grassroots opportunities. There is evidence to suggest that young children have a positive perception of PE, but this changes as they grow older (Trudeau and Shepherd, 2005). Given this and the importance of a positive view of PE in childhood to aid health through lifelong participation (Kirk, 2005) this study focussed upon the older secondary sector in order to capture their perceptions of PE at an important time for development and just prior to them leaving mandatory PE, when future participation would be voluntary.

This study used the only unifying factor in all young people's physical activity development - the school PE lesson, to establish their views about PE and further afield sport if applicable.

The overall aim of this research is:

*To investigate the experiences, thoughts, feelings and opinions of children undertaking physical education (PE) in, both state and independent, secondary schools (and sport outside of school, if applicable), from their perspective, using the approach of pupil voice.*

### ***1.7.1 Research question***

The main research question was very broad. It had to be broad as this was a pupil voice study so the intention was not to influence pupils with a preconceived set of questions that the study would aim to answer. The answer to the study was whatever the pupils thought the issues were. Hence the research question was:

*What are pupils' experiences of participating in school PE lessons and if applicable, sport outside of school?*

By posing this question to pupils their responses and the direction in which they lead the study addressed issues in PE including perception, ability, gender, sector differences and community opportunities. Pupils also offered solutions to their concerns.

## **1.8 Thesis Structure**

Although at first glance the structure of this thesis seems to be quite standard and linear, the reality is that the study was anything but standard. The importance of allowing pupil voice to surface unimpeded, while limiting adult voice influence, created a non-linear approach to many aspects of the study. Primarily, this included the research question which was broad to allow for a direction to be set by the pupils. Although, the idea of researching experiences of pupils in PE was established by the author and the schools were chosen to give a breadth of experience, the direction was then driven by the voice of pupils.

Furthermore, in many studies the literature review precedes the data collection, but in this case, apart from a short initial review of the area, the main literature review followed the findings to reflect the themes. This was to militate against the influence of adult voice and enhance the correlation between pupil voice and situating the study in the field. However, for ease of understanding and accessibility the original short pre-study literature review and main post-data collection and findings literature review have been combined. Some aspects of the pre-study review were not retained as they were not relevant to the pupil voice findings, whereas anything relevant was incorporated.

The theoretical framework, to aid analysis and interpretation, is also normally pre-chosen but once again in this study it followed the data collection and findings. The rationale for this was to ensure that the framework was best placed to reflect and interpret accurately what the pupils were saying and thus it was chosen to fit their voice, not the other way around.

The research methodology uses a qualitative phenomenological approach. Although, this was a decision of adult voice, it was based upon the premise that voice is about experiences, emotions and feelings of individuals, forged through their life events and interaction with other people. Likewise, the data collection methods were of adult voice design but with the intention to maximise the capture of pupil voice and allow for pupil involvement in the scrutiny of the process.

The themes derived from pupil voice, although overlapping, were discussed on a thematic basis and then supplemented with a concluding overarching discussion chapter. The main purpose of such chapters was not only to highlight issues or proficiencies in PE but also the organic evolution of the solutions and improvements to practice extolled by pupils.

Despite this non-linear approach the written thesis has been constructed in a typical linear manner to aid access and understanding.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

‘the people in the D team might need exercise’ (Michael, IS)

### 2.1 Introduction

The value of this study is twofold. It gives an insight into the experiences of pupils in PE in their situations but the process of gaining that insight through the pupil voice model is of equal importance. Therefore, it is crucial to represent this process in all aspects of the study including the literature review.

The study is a product of pupil voice, and I am cognisant that this chapter will host adult voice, which could prejudice, influence and undermine the pupil voice findings in the study. Thus, this chapter is broken down into three parts to aid understanding of the process and influencing factors at play. It demonstrates the evolution and journey of the application of theory from literature and hence the role of adult voice in this study.

The first section examines literature in the field of pupil voice and positions the stance of this study using said theory as a backdrop.

The second section was originally intended to feature two segments, with part one examining the literature scrutinised prior to data collection in order for the stimulant questions for the focus groups to be set upon a theoretical base. This segment of the literature review was intentionally condensed to give stimulus questions some foundation while also limiting preconceptions from adult voice. Part two of the second section was to feature a review of the literature based upon the themes that emerged from pupil voice in the findings, which was larger than the pre-study literature. However, to assist clarity of literature in the field these two parts have been combined into a joint literature review under the five themes emerging from pupil voice. The post-findings literature review predominates due to this being a pupil voice model, as the literature follows their voice rather than the opposite way around. The pre- and post-data collection literature reviews were quite different in many aspects, such as the headings used in their separate forms (see Appendix 10).

The final section considers the theoretical framework applied to support interpretation of the pupil voice findings. This theoretical framework emerged as a response to the findings rather than being pre-selected. This was to safeguard the influence of pupil voice (emerging in the findings) on the theoretical framework and militate against adult voice influence. A preconceived framework would have increased adult voice influence and undermined the validity of the pupil voice process.

## 2.2 Pupil Voice

The terms ‘pupil voice’ and ‘student voice’ can be used interchangeably or can attempt to indicate a difference between primary and secondary school children (Robinson and Taylor, 2007). Much of the literature when referring to pupil voice identifies it as student voice. This extends not only to pupils in school but also to students in further and higher education. This can easily blur and confuse what age group studies are discussing. Although studies are termed student voice in university, these students are indeed students but are also adults. This study is not about adult voice, it is purely about the voice of children in school PE lessons. Therefore, although some literature on ‘student voice’ can inform ‘pupil voice’, this study is rooted solely in the voices of children and to reflect this, their voice will be described as ‘pupil voice’ to distinguish them from the wider body of work on ‘student voice’. Voice as a term includes but is not just, the spoken words of pupils, it encompasses the feelings and insights of their world view (Robinson and Taylor, 2007). Voice is not singular but rather a ‘cacophony of competing voices’ (Reay and Arnot, 2002 p.8). Pupil voice defines the voices of children in a school setting and is the most appropriate term for this study.

Pupils are the key stakeholder and user group in education and without them formal school education would not exist. However, it has been argued that pupils’ voices tend to be marginalised (Arnowitz and Giroux, 1993; Dyson 1995; Brooker and MacDonald, 1999; Enright and O’Sullivan, 2012; Fisette, 2013). When relating pupil voice to Physical Education (PE) it seems apparent that pupil voice is even more limited in this subject area (Brooker and MacDonald, 1999; Dyson, 2006; Fisette, 2013). Where there is pupil voice it is often not heard (Brooker and MacDonald, 1999; Fisette, 2013) with some schools creating environments where pupils are voiceless (Giroux, 1992; Brooker and MacDonald, 1999; Fielding and Rudduck, 2002). Curriculum innovation is unlikely to feature pupil voice at all, rather surface compliance if anything (Brooker and MacDonald, 1999; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006). Maybe this is because pupil voice can be seen as a challenge for teachers (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2012) or it could be due to the lack of genuine partnership (Fielding, 2004a).

Research suggests that there is not a range of pupil voices in PE research (Brooker and MacDonald, 1999). Voices in PE, if they appear, tend to focus upon girls in studies like that of Fisette (2013) and Enright and O’Sullivan (2012). There are reasons behind this female focus, given that PE can be believed to have a male dominated structure and be gender biased (Evans, 1993; Azzarito and Solman; 2006a, 2009) and can leave girls feeling alienated and marginalised (Portman, 1995b; Penny, 2002; McCaughtry; 2004). Teachers and male students, in particular the top performers, can dominate PE and hold the positions of power (Fisette, 2013) and also ‘the curriculum may serve some pupils better than others’ (Brooker and MacDonald, 1999, p.87). This focus upon female voice could be in part generated by research such as Koca and Demirhan (2004) which found that boys have a more positive attitude towards PE than girls. They also found that boys have a positive attitude towards challenging PE whereas girls are more positive towards aesthetic activities. Some of the methodologies used to investigate such voice use a feminist

tradition given the gender issues that seem apparent in this subject field. Research also tends to be focussed upon state schools even though independent schools have long traditions of sporting prowess and do produce a disproportionate number of elite athletes (Morton, 2021).

Despite the evidence for a curriculum dominated by boys which favours competitiveness and aggression (Bramham, 2003) we cannot stereotype this to mean all boys or conversely not include all girls. Surely, some boys can feel as alienated and as marginalised as some girls in this environment and equally some girls thrive and enhance their self-esteem (Bramham, 2003; Säfvenbom et al, 2014). At independent schools that offer sport's scholarships, feelings of inadequacy may well be exacerbated because of the expectations placed upon their shoulders to perform in this PE arena and just because pupils are male does not necessarily protect them from such feelings. Pupils' answers are not universal, so voice needs to be conducted with a range of pupils in a range of situations (Cook- Sather, 2002) and this includes male and female pupils and different types of schools such as state and independent (Morton, 2021).

There is not one clear or categorical definition of pupil voice, rather multiple and overlapping definitions. Pupil voice can be applied to a variety of activities in school and is quite broad by definition, although it should also be about power to raise issues and bring change (Robinson and Taylor, 2013). Britzman (1989) has several meanings representing the concept of such voice, including literal, metaphorical and political meanings. Graham (1995) as editor of a special edition of the Journal of Teaching in Physical Education on '*student voice*' describes voice more in terms of what pupils think, know and feel. Fletcher (2005) advocates voice to be the validity and authority of pupils to improve schools. Gunter and Thomson (2007) define it as pupils being actively involved in the education of themselves and others. Robinson and Taylor (2007) deemed pupil voice to be verbal and non-verbal communications and have created principles of pupil voice which they refer to as 'four core values':

Conception of communication as dialogue

The requirement for participation and democratic inclusivity

The recognition that power relations are unequal and problematic

The possibility for change and transformation

(Robinson and Taylor 2007, p.8)

Although, all these definitions are theorised and provide a structure, their focus is naturally on pupil voice in school with teachers. This study is somewhat removed from this situation with a third party (university researcher) hearing and listening to the voice and conveying the message back to the school and the academic community. Aspects still resonate such as voice being about thinking, feeling and knowing as asserted by Graham (1995). Two of the core values of Robinson and Taylor (2007) are also applicable. Participation of many voices from as wide a spectrum as possible without favour or consequence is central to the study as is the appreciation of power relations with a



commitment to ensuring the pupils feel as equal as they can, with the researcher and each other, during the process. Unfortunately, due to not being a part of the school the core values of the continuation of such dialogue and transformation cannot be promised or determined.

Although transformation is not a guarantee in this project, that does not mean the pupils will not be listened to and heard. Researchers and educators should listen and hear what pupils are saying and this means that they have to respond (Cook-Sather, 2002; Batchelor 2006; Gunter and Thomson, 2007; Robinson and Taylor, 2007). Robinson and Taylor (2013) feel voice should be about the power for children to improve experience by creating change and this can only happen if they are heard. In order to have a chance to hear it is important to create spaces for voices to be heard (Fisette, 2013). This could include creating the right environment, making pupils feel empowered and bracketing adult voice and preconceptions.

Why is pupil voice important? Attitudes influencing participation, factors influencing such attitudes and understanding of teacher-learning process and class environment are crucial for teachers and good teaching (Koca and Demirhan, 2004). The role of the teacher should be about cultivating positive attitudes (Koca and Demirhan, 2004) and pupil voice is a significant instrument in this quest. This stance was reinforced by DCSF (2008) advocating listening to children's voices with regard to engaging them in learning. The influences of social and youth culture can affect PE, possibly more than any other subject (Tinning and Fitzclarence, 1992; Enright and O'Sullivan, 2010). Engagement with pupil voice can help with understanding these influences, they can be reflected in pedagogy and curriculum (Brooker and MacDonald, 1999) and with pupil alienation and attitudes (Carlson, 1995). If activities are relevant and have meaning to pupils then they are much more likely to engage (Kretchmar, 2000). However, 'pupil-led pedagogies are absent in schools' (Enright and O'Sullivan, 2012, p.256) but they can lead to changing practices (Enright and O'Sullivan, 2012). It is important to create something with the expressions of the voice (Brooker and MacDonald, 1999) and this can be boundary crossing, although it can be hard to achieve by a teacher in isolation (Enright and O'Sullivan, 2012). Nevertheless, pupil voice could make a difference to engagement through attitude and pedagogy in terms of educational policy, school direction and improvement, schooling experience and relationship building (Rudduck et al, 1996; Pollard, 1997; Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Smyth 2007; Cook-Sather, 2015).

Adult definitions of pupil voice vary and can be tokenistic just to meet an agenda rather than real and active (Thomson, 2011; Robinson and Taylor, 2013; Jopling and Riordan, 2021). In Education, in a number of instances pupil voice tends to mean adults have an issue and present this to pupils to get their voice (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002; Starkey, 2018) and the mechanism becomes manipulative with a mismatch between practice and rhetoric (Fielding, 2004a; Fielding, 2004b; Lodge, 2005; Thomson and Gunter, 2005). There can be fear surrounding involvement of pupils (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002), although studies dictate this is unfounded with requests by pupils being quite modest (Levin, 2000). This suspicion can lead to limiting pupil involvement to safe aspects of

school life, from an adult perspective, such as uniform or school meals (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002). Authenticity requires pupils to be able to determine the focus, be non-contrived and have active follow up on discussion (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006). However, pupils and teachers are not equal (Fielding, 2004a) and resulting power relations in schools can mean pupil voice is actually dominated by adult agendas (Robinson and Taylor, 2013). The intention of this study is for the issues to originate from the pupils whose thoughts, feelings, experiences and opinions drive the research.

Voice in PE is uncommon and tends to mean girls in state schools. Boys are rarely involved and independent schools are virtually never involved. A rare example of this was a study by Hay and MacDonald (2010b) focussing upon two schools in Australia, one being a state school and the other independent. However, it was not an unadulterated pupil voice study as it used observations as well as interviews and was specific to ability construction. Adam Morton (2021) who cites a dearth of research into sport in independent schools, looked at the independent schools' impact upon producing elite athletes although this was not a pupil voice study and involved interviewing staff and pupils on that specific topic. This study has an inclusive mandate involving pupils in their own environment from different socioeconomic backgrounds, encompassing girls, boys, state and independent schools, in order to give a breadth of voice.

## **2.3 Substantive Literature Review**

Following the pupil voice data collection, five themes emerged from the thoughts, experiences and opinions of the pupils. The literature review for the study was then framed around these themes so that it was led by the findings from their voice rather than being driven purely from the adult voice of researchers in the field. However, aspects from the brief pre-study literature review, prior to the involvement of the schools or pupils, have been integrated for clarity and coherence.

The search involved databases, including Northumbria University library resources, Education Abstracts and Google Scholar, and with key words and phrases such as youth sport, school PE, ability, development, importance of sport and health. Papers that emerged aided the search through their bibliographic content. Grey literature including Government papers, Sport England reports, relevant websites etc. also featured in the search.

### **2.3.1 Choice**

The National Curriculum for Physical Education was introduced into schools in 1992. It gave a prescriptive curriculum to state schools and identified team games as a core and compulsory element at the heart of secondary PE. The national curriculum for PE states that it 'should ensure that pupils develop competence and confidence to

take part in a range of physical activities that become a central part of their lives, both in and out of school' (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA], 2007). This use of the word 'range' does suggest at governmental level an expectation of many different types of activities to be involved in. However, the expectation of Ofsted and the correlation of a link between standards and traditional team games severely constrained opportunity for choice (Green, 2003). In recent years many state schools such as academies and free schools have been given the authority to opt out of the National Curriculum (HM Government, 2019). Independent schools were never required to follow the National Curriculum and the state school involved in this study is an academy, so it too is not bound by the National Curriculum. Therefore, in theory both schools could give choice to their pupils if that was their local policy.

The concept/theory of choice in the pedagogy, curriculum and process of Physical Education (PE) for pupils in schools is a very limited area of study. Smith et al (2009), which is a rare study on choice in PE, conducted focus groups for children across 7 secondary schools in North West England and Wales. The focus groups consisted of 153, 15–16-year-olds, which is a similar sample size and age range to this study. However, it did not evolve from the focus group phase so was dissimilar to the process of this study which added breadth through a questionnaire survey and depth through interviews. The study revealed that in this particular group of schools the pupils felt they had choice in PE, and they valued choice. That said pupils were still dissatisfied with the range of choice, in particular the dominance of traditional sports and there was still a large degree of teacher selection in any choice on offer (Smith et al, 2009). Girls and lower socio-economic groups expressed most dissatisfaction with regard to limited opportunities through lack of choice (ibid).

The lack of choice in PE can be a reason for non-participation as pupils would like to engage in activities that mean something to them (Couturier et al, 2005). However, it has been suggested that choice is only effective if pupils are self-motivated (Lonsdale et al, 2009). It could be contended that if pupils can choose an activity they enjoy, and are interested in, then this would lead to self-motivation (Brooks and Magnussun, 2006). In order to provide a curriculum to meet the needs of young people and offer a contemporary and appropriate range of activities it is imperative to involve pupils in the decision-making process and give them a voice (Smith et al, 2009; El Sherif, 2014).

There is a wider remit of choice in educational literature although the relationship between choice and education is a complex one. The policy of several Governments over the past thirty years has been one to give school choice to the parent, break the state monopoly and drive-up standards as a result (Meyland-Smith and Evans, 2009; West and Bailey, 2013; Lupton and Thomson, 2015).

The main area of choice could be argued as that of parental choice regarding potential schools to send your child. This could mean the independent sector if you have the means (not a choice for most), a range of types of school in the state sector or home schooling. The majority of parents seem to feel it is important to have choice and that they should put the needs of their child first and foremost (Exley and Suissa, 2013). Parents could in theory send their

child to a school specialising in sport or PE. Therefore, a child wanting to undertake a sports-orientated curriculum could notionally in conjunction with parental support and consent, seek out such a school or in contrast a child not wanting said PE orientated curriculum could avoid such a school. Some parents may be attracted to a school on the basis of provision of sports (Schneider and Buckley, 2002). However, in reality this is not as straightforward as it seems, and parents can feel a lack of choice (Jopling, 2019). Entry to a school is dictated by the admissions criteria of each school and applicants need to match this at some level. There is still quite a prowess and status with regard to sport in the independent sector as they can produce a disproportionate amount of elite athletes (Morton, 2021). However, this opportunity needs to be paid for by parents with very few scholarships on offer for the full fee. This alone dramatically reduces choice and will rule out most children.

There is not a lot of research on why pupils choose to study PE for a qualification (MacPhail, 2000). Although what there is suggests the choice is driven by enjoyment and career aspiration (ibid). Many pupils choose their options in either Year 9 or progressively Year 8, but the word option can be a misnomer. Many subjects are mandatory in school with measures of school performance ensuring a very rigid system and little choice (Parameshwaran and Thomson, 2015). Many children are put into pathways in schools depending on their ability and this consigns them to certain subjects and qualifications. The limited choice is further eroded by some subjects being either/or, parental and teacher persuasion, and thinking ahead to further qualifications or employment in the future (Wikeley and Stables, 1999). In this maelstrom PE as a GCSE subject could possibly be easily avoided but equally for an enthusiast it may take a degree of complexity to convince influential stakeholders (i.e., Parents and Teachers) and find the space in the option pathways. However, PE will still be undertaken in the school up to and including Year 11 regardless of GCSE. This could be to the dismay of pupils who dread PE but to the joy of those who enjoy it.

Choosing your own curriculum in a subject is quite unheard of for pupils in school. Although it is acknowledged that a number of schools have to follow the National Curriculum this is not true for the independent sector, free schools or academies, but in practice many academies still do follow it. However, when considering non-accredited PE in Year 10 and 11, why can pupils not have more flexibility to choose? When they enter adulthood in a few years' time they will have this right to choose or not. This could be a seemingly logical solution for non-GCSE classes especially as school exists for its pupils. However, despite the fact that in schools pupils are the key stakeholders they themselves are normally bottom of the pyramid when it comes to educational reform (Sarason, 1990; Triggs and Pollard, 1998).

Some schools can limit the choice of sports that girls are given the opportunity to play, for example football and rugby, which if they did participate and it stimulated their interest, they may have gone on to join clubs outside of school (Smith et al, 2009; Guardian, 2017). It does seem apparent that choice is limited for boys also as not many, if any, play netball for instance. However, studies tend to focus on girls and there is a dearth of literature analysing this

aspect from the perspective of boys. If literature exists it tends to be linked to hegemonic masculine identity in PE such as a study by Bramham (2003).

Many students have a positive attitude to PE especially when they are young but could a repetitive curriculum and pedagogy cause decline in attitude (Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). There is evidence to suggest that students lose interest in PE due to the nature of classes (Portman 1995a). Would a solution be to give an element of choice? Would children want it, studies suggest they would (Smith et al, 2009; El Sherif, 2014). PE can empower children but if done badly it can create findings of anxiety and inadequacy (Guardian, 2017) and affect confidence and self-esteem (Brooks and Magnusson, 2006; Smith et al, 2009; El Sherif, 2014). Choice through pupil voice rather than teacher voice could play a pivotal role in addressing such issues.

### ***2.3.2 Participation***

In schools, participation in PE is not a choice it is mandatory. Within this mandatory setting the activities to participate in are prescribed. However, outside of school participation in PE is voluntary and there can be some degree of choice based on availability, access and economics.

What happens in such classes has a bearing on how children view physical activity. Positive experiences are linked to enjoyment (Prochaska et al, 2003) and it therefore follows that if children find PE to be a positive activity, they are more likely to enjoy it. If PE promotes positive and enjoyable engagement this in turn can promote participation (Prochaska et al, 2003) and can increase self-esteem in children (Trudeau and Shephard, 2005). Experiences in past PE situations are vital for shaping attitudes, habits and beliefs and it is essential that these have developed the relevant skills to make PE an experience which children enjoy (Gallotta et al, 2017). However, Bloodworth and McNamee (2009) assert that PE and sport are not necessarily enjoyable, they can be stressful, but they ultimately boost wellbeing and some activities that are pleasurable do not necessarily augment well-being (ibid). This obviously can be true but are pupils more likely to participate on grounds of enjoyment or well-being?

Pupils potentially would look to participation outside of school if they enjoyed PE in school. What would make PE more enjoyable? Smith (2006) found that intrinsic factors such as having fun made pupils more likely to enjoy PE, with this crucial ingredient of fun being reinforced in a study by Garn and Cothran, (2006). Fun can also be significant in outside of school participation (Littlefair and Nichol, 2019) and potentially more crucial as participation is voluntary unlike participation in school. Contrastingly, experiences that are not deemed to be enjoyable in PE can have a detrimental effect upon participation. Experiences such as humiliation and other negative emotions can cause catastrophic and long-lasting damage to participation in PE (Carlson, 1995; Morgan and Hanson, 2008; Morgan and Burke, 2008; Lauritsalo et al, 2015). Even if pupils do not feel such strong negative emotions towards PE there is evidence of difficulties and problems that are widespread (Enright and O'Sullivan, 2010;

Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011; Fisette, 2011; von Seelen, 2012; Cardinal et al, 2013). These problems are likely to influence the enjoyment factor which will in turn affect participation. To promote participation Lyngstad et al, (2016) suggested that all pupils need to have a positive learning experience in PE.

PE in schools can differ quite widely especially in the different phases of schooling. Participation is deemed to be more enjoyable by pupils in primary school compared to secondary school (Birtwhistle and Brodie, 1991; Prochaska et al, 2003; Shropshire et al, 2006). Could this be linked to pedagogy or teachers or simply age? Teachers in secondary schools are PE specialists whereas those in primary school tend not to be, so in one sense the trajectory appears to be in the wrong direction. Non- specialists have a different approach and bring their own experiences with them when delivering PE (Armour and Yelling, 2003; Hardman, 2004; Keay 2006; Morgan and Burke, 2008). Many do not believe they have the knowledge or ability to teach PE and are critical of their lack of preparation in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes (Morgan and Burke, 2008). Primary teachers tend to deliver what they think is PE from past experiences and rely on team sports rather than development (Ashton, 1988; Morgan and Hansen, 2008). Thus, the quality of PE teaching in the primary school can be an issue in the development of pupils (Morgan and Hanson, 2008; Hardman and Marshall, 2011). Therefore, it should follow that pupils do not enjoy PE as much in primary as they are not being developed and taught by specialists. However, primary teachers could deliver a different style of pedagogy and feature different types of physical activity in potentially a less pressured and competitive environment than the secondary school, which may be more enjoyable for many pupils.

While secondary schools have specialist PE teachers, they are also shaped by their experiences which probably were positive given their pursuit of PE teaching as a career. This can lead to sports and games-orientated sessions dominating (Kirk, 2004; Morgan and Hansen, 2008) and there also does seem to be a tendency to focus on more able pupils in secondary PE (Penney and Houlihan, 2003; Penney, 2004; Morgan and Hanson, 2008; Elliot et al, 2013). Secondary school teachers' experiences and attitudes can influence how they view pupils, and this can create frustration with some pupils (Brown, 2015b). The hegemonic values of physicality can dominate the discourse, and this can lead to exclusion of pupils, in particular females (Brown, 2015a). This view can also dominate curriculum and pedagogy leading to lessons that favour pupils who embrace competitive sport (Safvenbom et al, 2014). Paechter (2003) sees PE in secondary schools as being dominated by competitive team sports and competitiveness can alienate some pupils and discourage participation (Brooks and Magnussun, 2006; Littlefair and Nichol, 2019). Subramaniam and Silverman (2007) suggest that the type of repetitive curriculum and the pedagogies applied in secondary school compared with primary school leads to this age-related decline in enjoyment and attitude.

This decline in enjoyment of PE, although apparent between primary and secondary school could possibly be more age related and less phase related. Young children are more enthusiastic about PE and a number of studies have found an age-related decrease in physical activity for children (Gordon-Larsen et al, 2000; Sallis et al, 2000; Boyle et al, 2008; Larouche et al, 2012; Ortega et al., 2013). Evidence suggests that as children mature, they enjoy PE less

and thoughts on PE and PE teachers become more negative (Humbert et al, 2006). This age-related decline coincides with a decline in positive attitudes towards PE (Prochaska et al, 2003) and corresponds with the transition from primary to secondary schooling (Birtwistle and Brodie, 1991). Although PE changes across this transition as it tends to be more structured and taught by specialists with more resources, some literature suggests that these circumstances are more beneficial for children (Hardman and Marshall, 2011). Therefore, phase could be coincidental due to the age of transition. Nevertheless, secondary school PE can with segregation and structure disadvantage girls and limit boys (Williams 1993; Shropshire et al, 1997) and without adolescent friendly PE activities, secondary schools can contribute to this age-related decline (Brooks and Magnussun, 2006).

A study in Norway suggested that adolescent females have a less positive attitude to PE than males but positive attitudes for both sexes tend to decrease with age (Safvenbom et al, 2014). Prochaska et al (2003) similarly found evidence that this decline in enjoyment and interest in PE as pupils get older is more prevalent in girls and also people not in sports teams. The PE experience at secondary school can be different for girls and boys (Dickenson and Sparks, 1988; Shropshire et al, 1997). It could relate to differing tastes and preferences in boys and girls when it comes to physical activity. Shropshire et al (1997) suggested that more boys are interested in PE than girls. Some research suggests that boys tend to like more challenging activities in PE and girls prefer more aesthetic activities (Folsom-Meek, 1992; Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007) and activities in PE do not match girls' preferences (Prochaska et al, 2003). Not matching preferences of activity could also be true for children not involved in sports teams or the fact they are not involved may suggest they are not as interested or possibly less able in PE. Those with great motivation in PE appear to be the pupils involved in organised sport and they show much more desire and self-determination in PE lessons than those not involved (Portman 1995a; Safvenbom et al, 2014). Thus, this suggests that the nature of PE lessons favour pupils involved in competitive youth sports (Safvenbom et al, 2014).

The nature of PE delivered in school may also contribute towards demotivation and exclusion. The school curriculum tends to be dominated by team games over lifestyle forms of PE which can alienate some pupils (Fairclough et al, 2002; Green and Thurston 2002; Cale and Harris, 2005). Equally extra- curricular PE tends to be competitive team games, and this tends to provide for the 'sporty' pupils rather than those who do not like competition or team games (Boyle et al, 2008). Many pupils who are inactive physically and groups with low participation find competitive traditional sports unappetizing (Green, 2002b; Brooks and Magnussun, 2006; Smith & Parr, 2007). 'What appears to be missing from the debate is clear understanding of the pedagogies that are most likely to lead to the desired outcomes of increasing physical activity engagement and sustaining that increase during and beyond school years' (Armour and Harris, 2013, p.205).

The age effect in enjoyment and participation, especially in girls, can be linked with adolescence as it creates more problems with appearance and body issues due to pupils having to change communally and wear sporting attire (Walseth et al, 2017; YMCA, 2017; Guardian, 2017). PE is unique amongst the subjects in PE in so far as

participants need to get changed in a communal area prior to undertaking the lesson and wear sportswear which means more of the body is on display than in other school lessons. This can lead to pupils, especially teenagers, trying to get out of the lesson in order to avoid getting changed in front of others. In a poll of 2,000 teenagers, almost one third avoided activities like PE because of body confidence and fears about their looks (YMCA, 2017). Fisette (2011) argues that socially constructed perceptions of the body are institutionalised in schools and have influence on pupils with regard to participation in PE. Girls, in particular, may find this difficult and can be more embarrassed playing sport than boys (Shropshire et al, 1997) and this could explain the differential in enjoyment decline between genders. Girls may also have gone off sport because it did not fit with their perceived image (Shropshire et al, 1997). Having enough time at the end of a PE lesson to recover and fix attire can also be important to children. This can particularly affect girls and giving them enough time to cool down and change can improve participation (Guardian, 2017). Allowing girls to design their sportswear uniform to one they are more comfortable to wear can also aid participation (Brooks and Magnussun, 2006).

The type of sports that children participate in can also be affected by gender. Enright and O'Sullivan (2010) found that girls in particular were affected by gender barriers, and this influenced their participation. Some schools can limit the sports that girls are given the opportunity to play, for example football and rugby, which if they did participate and it stimulated their interest, they may have gone on to join clubs outside of school (Guardian, 2017). A game-based PE curriculum could also limit and discourage girls from participating in physical activity outside of school (Scruton, 2001). However, such gender barriers are not exclusive to females as boys' participation can also be influenced by such stereotyping (Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011). Boys not fitting hegemonic masculine ideals can also be discouraged or prohibited through 'trials' to participate in sport outside of school (Brown, 2015b).

Gender can also illuminate differences when considering attitudes and motivation. There is some evidence that girls lose interest due to lack of academic prestige (Trudeau and Shephard, 2005). This becomes more profound as they get older and are not studying accredited PE (ibid). In the PE lesson, highly performing girls can be encouraged by teachers but those more moderate can be discouraged by the same teachers (Trudeau and Shephard, 2005). Humbert (2006) found many females dislike PE due to demeaning comments made to them by PE teachers and other pupils. Teaching in PE should have the same standards and principles as teaching in any other subject (Chorney, 2011) but evidence suggests there can be discrepancies in approach. Boyle et al, (2008) found that there is a tension with some PE teachers especially those with successful sports teams that they can tend to favour elite team performance over the collective activity. Even teachers who favour maximum participation in PE also see sport outside of that as talent development and elitist (ibid).

Attitude is particularly important in PE and children with positive attitudes tend to be more likely to participate in sport or some form of physical activity outside of school (Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). Attitude can be based upon two components beliefs (cognitive) and feelings (affect) (Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). PE teachers can



promote the cognitive component of attitude and create interest, such stimulation of interest can then empower children (Mitchell, 1993; Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). Teachers need to be aware of and understand the cognitive and affective components of overall attitude (Biddle and Mutrie, 2001; Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). Some studies suggest that in particular, girls, older children and less able PE students rely on PE for their enjoyment of physical activity (Prochaska et al, 2003; Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). Any negative impact on attitude from the learning environment may cause long lasting dislike of PE, thus we need active and meaningful engagement for children in PE (Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). Unfavourable attitudes developed by children can discourage them from out of school involvement in sport or physical activity (Davidson, 1982; Shropshire et al, 1997).

The role of PE must promote positive attitudes about engagement, fitness and health, but attitudes do not necessarily lead to changes in behaviour (Birtwistle and Brodie, 1991). Participation in exercise can be dependent on an array of factors. PE strategies need to develop beliefs and feelings to encourage positive attitudes and teachers need to know the factors that influence attitudes (ibid).

Although participation in PE inside of school is a mandatory part of the curriculum and therefore an opportunity conferred upon all pupils for free, most organised physical activity outside of school ranging from sporting teams to gyms, requires some kind of membership or entrance fee. This can be seen even in the careers of elite athletes, with legendary footballer Kenny Dalglish (originating from a working-class background), stating he would play any sport he could afford to participate in (Dalglish and Winter, 1996). This suggests there is an economic barrier to participation.

Research from the USA indicates that people of higher social class are less likely to participate in proletariat sports (Wilson, 2002). These are defined as those sports that are less costly to be involved with due to smaller equipment costs or those that are accessible within the community. In the UK there also seems to be a class element to sport participation. Craig and Beedie, (2010), found that the middle class tend to be involved in sport but only that associated with the middle class. Although this cannot necessarily be generalised, some form of correlation seems to be apparent when you compare rugby, tennis and cricket with football, running and swimming. Independent schools tend to produce the next generation of elite athletes in rugby, rowing and to a lesser extent cricket, whereas elite footballers and athletes tend to come from state schools. Children in Africa, with a higher level of social deprivation, gravitate towards football as minimal equipment is needed (Meier and Saavedra, 2009). Hence the cheaper sports i.e., football, are easier to engage with for children from a poorer background (Finkelstine et al, 2012).

Children can readily identify with sports stars and see them as role models. Young people are quite capable of making their own informed judgements about sports stars and can select individual favourites (Lines, 2000). Role models can provide a route map for the possible success of a young person's future self (Meier and Saavedra, 2009). Lines (2001) indicates that sports stars as role models for boys are highly visible but female sports stars are rarely

recognised as such for young women. This does not stop girls seeing them as role models and indeed a lot has changed in the intervening 20 years since Lines' (2001) study with interventions such as 'This girl can'. The boxer Esther Phiri consciously presented herself as a role model for girls in Zambia and encouraged their participation in sport (Meier and Saavedra, 2009).

In summary, there seems a range of causes for the decline and reluctance in participation which broadly fall into three categories being individual, institutional and societal (Shropshire et al, 1997). Reasons for participation can be complex but with schools being the only form of mass mandatory involvement their contribution to shaping attitudes is critical. Other factors can play a role such as opportunities in the community and identity, but the experiences of the PE classroom are central to how pupils view participation (Prochaska et al, 2003).

### ***2.3.3 Pressure***

Participation in PE can be affected by pressure, which is something many pupils face in PE and the reason they face it can be for vastly differing reasons.

Pressure in sport is nothing new, the media use phrases regularly to describe such pressure suggesting that some people thrive on pressure and others can 'bottle' due to pressure. This has been used to describe winning and losing, the latter tending to be related to not coping with the burden.

Pressure in sport for children seems to be quite apparent and there does seem to be a link to winning, similar to the elite level of sport. Children can relate their own experiences such as in sporting clubs to be that of pressure due to the desire to be on a winning team (Littlefair and Nichol, 2019). In this pursuit of winning anyone seeming to be a weak link can be exposed to harassment and criticism (Portman, 1995a; Brooks and Magnusson, 2006). Such pressure can reach an extent that children can feel bullied, humiliated and this can harm their self-esteem (Morgan and Hanson, 2008; Morgan and Burke, 2008; Lauritso et al, 2015; Lyngstad et al, 2016). This experience understandably leads to negative emotions about PE which affect future participation (Lauritso et al, 2015) and naturally undermines self-belief in ability in the subject (Bandura, 1977). It evolves into a 'vicious circle' of criticism undermining confidence and building pressure which in turn affects performances which unleashes further criticism.

What are the sources of such judgement and hence pressure? Teachers can be one such source with research indicating that they focus on higher ability and neglect lower ability to some degree (Penny and Houlihan, 2003; Penney, 2004; Morgan and Hanson, 2008; Elliot et al, 2013). Teachers can also be seen by some pupils as adding to the pressure with their demands or criticism placed upon less able (Trudeau and Shephard, 2005; Lynstad et al, 2015). Pressure and judgement also seem to flow readily from peers, in particular from pupils who deem themselves

to be high ability towards those whom they consider low ability (Portman, 2003). There seems to be a pecking order in PE recognised by pupils in which those at the bottom are harassed and criticised for mistakes tolerated if committed by highly skilled students (Portman, 1995b).

Pressure is not only the preserve of those children deemed to be low ability. High ability children can also feel pressure and judgement within the subject. This can be internal pressure to perform that they place upon themselves. If children feel they need to reach a particular standard and they deem themselves to have failed then this places pressure upon them (Mouratidis et al, 2009; Verkooijen et al, 2012). This can in turn damage their own self-esteem and perception (von Seelen, 2012). Young athletes performing at elite level can have significant pressure due to fear about failure in their sport (Cohn, 1990; Scanlan et al, 1991; Gould et al, 1993; Puente- Diaz and Anshel, 2005).

It is not only internal pressure that can affect high ability children in PE and sport. Parents can make demands of children with regard to performance or amount of training and also not protect them from other sources of pressure such as coaches (Sabato et al, 2016; Kerr et al, 2016). Negative feedback from parents with regard to performance can also lead to diminished self-esteem in children (Dunn et al, 2006; Gould et al, 2006; Shields et al, 2007). High ability children tend to be in sporting teams outside of school and their coaches can also be sources of pressure. Such pressure can take various forms including censure, omission and shouting (Alexander et al, 2011; Huffington Post, 2013; Mountjoy et al, 2015).

Although high-level challenge can be enjoyable and support development for some children, it can also pressurise and undermine others. The pressure of competition can affect all pupils with the Guardian (2017) finding that it particularly could turn off girls from PE and social sport and hence have a considerable impact on participation.

What coping mechanisms do pupils use to counteract such pressure? Hiding techniques in PE lessons in order to avoid situations where they could receive criticism are deployed by pupils (Lynstad et al, 2015). This is a technique used to try to preserve their self-esteem and perception (Ommundsen, 2001; Ommundsen, 2004; Ntoumanis et al, 2010). This technique means playing safe and not attempting higher level skills which ultimately affects development. If a player tries to play the ball out of defence in a football match and loses it there will be censure so next time (s)he will just kick the ball out of defence rather than playing it out, but the former is the higher order skill (Southgate, 2011).

The uniqueness of PE as a subject has aspects that can cause pressure which other subjects do not possess. PE lessons are very visible with pupils having to perform skills and get changed in front of others meaning they are observed and judged by others and can survey themselves as well (Fisette, 2011). Thus, body issues can create pressure, with pupils having to get changed in front of others and having to wear sporting attire (Walseth et al, 2017). This can be a particular issue for females who can feel that peers judge them on image and appearance (ibid).

Depending on their perception of their body and competence, girls can feel disempowered or empowered (Cockburn and Clarke 2002; Garrett 2004a; Hills 2007; Fisette, 2011).

In summary, although pedagogy in PE can be part of the problem (Safvenbom et al, 2014; Guardian, 2017) it could also be the solution. Teachers could create a learning environment with a learning experience differentiated to suit all needs. They could reduce the anxiety and pressure on pupils by building self-esteem and creating routes for success (Ntoumanis et al, 2010). If done well, PE can empower children but if done badly it can create feelings of anxiety and inadequacy (Guardian, 2017).

#### ***2.3.4 Development and Ability***

##### *Development*

Pressure can affect development of pupils in PE. In contrast to other subjects, PE is the opportunity for pupils to use their bodies and physicality for learning and is a rare opportunity in the school calendar for development in this manner. Hills (2007, p.317) states that, 'Physical education represents a dynamic social space where students experience and interpret physicality in a context that accentuates peer relationships and privileges particular forms of embodiment'.

However, the reality of PE, although positive for some in the description by Hills (2007), is not necessarily as positive for others. Asking adults anecdotally about memories of school PE can give a range of emotive responses. Those who did well and were picked first for team games, probably have a positive outlook on their experience. However, others will associate PE with negative emotions, embarrassing situations and humiliation (Morgan and Hanson, 2008; Morgan and Burke, 2008; Lauritsalo et al, 2015). A bad experience in school PE over time can cause permanent damage and affect pupils' future participation in sport (Lauritsalo, 2015). Bandura (1977) found that belief in ability and confidence is based upon life experience. Such self-efficacy helps motivation and enhances accomplishment of outcome (ibid). Applying this to the school PE context suggests that pupils with the potential to excel in some form of sport may be lost due to their personal experience in school PE. If the environment, curriculum, pedagogy or interactions drain belief then pupils are less likely to develop skills and achieve in PE. However, conversely if interactions and environment support belief then this enhances self-efficacy and makes pupils more likely to develop and succeed in PE.

To support children to learn and develop, high quality coaching seems to be one of the most important factors (Baker et al, 2003; De Bosscher et al, 2006; Sotiriadou and Shilberg, 2009). In PE, pupils do not have a coach, but they do have a teacher who facilitates their learning and to some degree needs to use coaching techniques. Starc and Strel (2012) demonstrated that the planning and delivery of PE lessons by PE specialist teachers in comparison to

generalist teachers resulted in a relative improvement of physical fitness. Another factor seen as important for development is the facilities available to the pupils (De Bosscher et al, 2006; Sotiriadou and Shilberg, 2009; Aquilina, 2013). Many primary schools do not have the necessary resources or facilities for PE, they do not have grass pitches or indoor sports halls or equipment (Ofsted, 2014).

Arguably, the most important factor in development is to be able to have a sustained period of high- quality practice (Baker et al 2003). This coupled with high quality competition can be a key success factor in skill development (Williams and Krane, 1998; Baker et al, 2003; Sotiriadou and Shilbury, 2009; Syed, 2011). Matthew Syed (2011) in his book 'Bounce' talks at length about how hours of high-quality practice against quality opponents developed him into a top table tennis player. Many pupils may not get this level of challenge with the Guardian (2017) suggesting that girls, in particular, may not get stretched enough. Although, such challenge may be good for the development of some children that may not be true for all. An educational approach based upon nurturing in the primary and secondary system (Baker, 2003; Collins et al, 2012) and emotional and parental support (Baker, 2003) are also important factors in development for young people.

There are a number of factors that can affect a child's development in PE. These include the drive to win as opposed to development and learning (Croston, 2013; Brown, 2015a). In some countries winning at sport is a secondary consideration to development at youth level. For example, in Spain they do not necessarily keep score in youth football as the focus is on development rather than winning (ECA, 2012). Brooks and Magnusson's (2006) study on inclusive participation demonstrated the mindset of winning in PE with the Head of PE suggesting the trade-off to inclusion was not having 'a great big trophy cabinet' (p.874).

Unlike in other subjects, a pupil's ability in PE is on display for all participants and teachers to see for all of the lesson (Fisette, 2011). Therefore, negative feedback from pupils and especially from the teacher can damage self-esteem and can lead to pupils trying to stay in their comfort zone and not attempting higher skills for fear of ridicule. Thus, PE teaching needs to focus on the pedagogy and pupils' emotional responses (Lauritsalo et al 2013). Either consciously or subconsciously PE teachers can label pupils elite and non-elite. This can hamper development and lead to frustration (Brown, 2015a).

There does not seem to be a clear link between participation in PE and continuation to either elite status or as a career (Green, 2014). However, participation in sport in the early part of life was found as a predisposition for many elite athletes (Roberts and Brodie, 1992; Dalglish and Winter, 1996). Birchwood et al (2008) did indicate that although early life participation and predisposition was an important factor this did not necessarily encompass school PE participation, however, there is anecdotal evidence of a link to PE participation and elite athletes from those athletes themselves (Green, 2014).

Skills ranging from sporting prowess to social interaction are cited as facets of development through PE. The development of social skills due to the nature of PE can also be cited as a benefit of participation in PE (Smith, 1999). PE as a subject can try to enhance status by indicating a range of life skills that it develops as an aim of the curriculum (Hardman, 2011; Kirk, 2013). The Department of Education (2013) acknowledged such an attribute of PE in the personal development of children. The life skills developed from PE can range but tend to include social skills, communication, problem solving, leadership, teamwork, goal setting and decision making (Dyson et al, 2004; Goudas and Giannoudis 2008; Smither and Zhu 2011; Johnston et al, 2013; Cronin et al, 2018). The approach of the PE teacher is crucial to the impact of acquiring such skills by giving children opportunity to develop in these areas (Cronin et al, 2018). Some of the skills developed could also be indirect and not necessarily purely due to PE but interactions surrounding the lesson (ibid).

The social skills of friendship could be positive and negative within the socio-cultural sphere of girls (Hills, 2007). Although for some girls the social side of PE could help enjoyment, these friendship structures could also exclude girls without social skills or those not in the friendship groupings (ibid).

Some research studies indicate the developmental benefits of PE on other academic achievement (Sallis et al, 1999; Rosewater, 2009; Chorney, 2011) with school sport's participation leading to better academic outcomes (Marsh and Kleitman, 2003; Stokvis, 2009). In particular, studies suggest it enhances memory and increases performance in tests (Weir, 2008). Chornley's (2011) findings indicate the regularity of participation in physical activity enhancing school achievement, although Donnelly et al (2016) contend that most research suggests it has a neutral effect upon academic development. Donnelly et al (2016) did find that physical activity can have a positive influence on brain structure and cognition although more research is necessary in this area including how it translates from laboratory-based tests to the school environment.

### *Ability*

At first glance it can be perceived that ability is inert and easily comparable and measurable. However, the perception of ability can influence how the achievement of pupils is judged (Evans, 2004). There is an assumption in the field of education that assessment reflects ability (Benjamin, 2003) and lack of achievement reflects lack of ability or effort (Hart, 1998). Hay and MacDonald (2010b) suggest that assessment difference can be related to the judgements of teachers rather than due to ability. This can have consequences as how a pupil feels about the perception of their ability can affect their desire to learn and their performance (Evans and Penney, 2008).

The acumen of teachers in judging ability is quite critical. However, their conception of ability and talent, can be influenced by their experience, or it can be problematic (Evans, 2004; Croston, 2013). PE practice can be associated

with male attributes, and this can become the yardstick by which everyone is measured (Hay and MacDonald, 2010a). Talent identification can be based upon physical attributes (Croston, 2013) and gender can undermine girls in PE (Hay and MacDonald, 2010a). Girls and Boys tend to be segregated in PE and can have different expectations, which does not happen in other subjects (Guardian, 2017). For girls, competence can be a significant factor when being judged on ability (Hills, 2007). This does interact with social norms and identities resulting in the labelling of girls as 'sporty' or 'non-sporty' (Hills, 2007, p.320). Judgements of ability can be shaped by socio-cultural influences and this influence of societal norms and expectations can disadvantage individuals (Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). It can lead to the exclusion of pupils who do not conform to masculine ideals (Brown, 2015a). Ability can be defined as a competence (Davies, 1995) or a talent relative to others (Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). The latter can be dependent upon the perspective of the judge and the valued attributes the individual has in that arena (Evans, 2004; Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). This can then make ability relative to the discourse of the PE lesson in which it is demonstrated and subjective to the nature of the most influential people in that lesson such as teachers and subsequently the pupils they deem as 'high ability' performers. Thus, if you do not appear to be competitive and physical then you can be judged as less able and become side-lined in the subject. This can then create a narrative for the individual which defines their future ability allocation. Ability in PE can tend to be seen as fixed and static (Kirk, 2004) or simply be seen as sports performance (Penney and Lisahunter, 2006). This can have a severe impact upon pupils and give them a low perception of their own ability and hence affect their willingness to display abilities (Evans and Penney, 2008). This can then drive an elitist agenda whereas philosophy needs to be an inclusive one rather than elitist (Guardian, 2017).

In summary, literature suggests that development in PE relies on a number of factors and that pedagogy and environment can hinder as well as support it. Although skill development is the major aspect, other forms of development such as social skills and even academic achievement feature in some studies. Judgements of ability and the perception of these by pupils can be vital for development, although in PE this is not necessarily as inert a process as would have been envisaged.

### ***2.3.5 Health***

The definition of health by the World Health Organisation (WHO) is a 'state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease or infirmity' (WHO, 1948). Sport is often linked to national health and wellbeing. We are regularly updated, through the news or by government agencies such as Public Health England, about rising obesity levels in children. This can partially be traced to a sedentary lifestyle i.e., children not going out anymore but staying in to play on the Xbox, internet etc. (Public Health England, 2013). Thus, it is a

government aim to get young people involved in physical activity to try to address this potentially serious issue. Therefore, a young person's perspective on PE could be critical to this wellbeing agenda.

The WHO recommends children being physically active for a minimum of one hour in a day (WHO, 2010). This in itself, given the organisation stating this, links physical exercise to health and brings an underlining assumption of the benefits of this relationship. This purpose of physical exercise to benefit health has become acknowledged on a global basis (Quennerstedt, 2019). Gallotta (2010) and Strong et al (2005) suggest that regular physical exercise can support children's health from both a physical and mental perspective. In fact, a number of studies have demonstrated the health benefits from physical activity (Pasco et al, 2011; Wen and Wu, 2012; Lee et al, 2012). PE in schools contributes to the subsequent health and wellbeing of children (Rink and Mitchell, 2002) and this childhood physical activity can increase the probability of participation in adulthood (Harro and Riddoch, 2000).

It appears that the link between physical exercise and health is well established and that PE in school is a mechanism for engaging children in physical activity. However, this correlation can be disputed with Bloodworth and McNamee (2009) asserting it depends upon type of exercise, length of time and intensity. Due to the physical nature of PE, it is connected to health, but Armour and Harris (2013) feel there is not a lot of evidence to indicate that PE improves health. However, it is generally felt that physical activity has a positive effect upon health (NHS, 2016). The most common argument with regard to increasing the participation of children in sport is on the basis of improving health (Hendry et al, 1994; Vuori et al, 1995; Bailey 2005). Schools seem to be the ideal place to provide this physical activity during PE lessons (Verrotti et al, 2014). On this basis, PE is particularly important to pupil health and can promote physical activity outside of school (Sallis and Mackenzie, 1991; Shropshire et al, 1997). The government is actively encouraging children to be involved not only in PE but in physical activity outside of school and/or continuing engagement in exercise following their school years (Great Britain, 2015). Children do link PE to health, so health promotion needs to improve beliefs and PE has to be seen as important if it is to promote health (Birtwistle and Brodie, 1991).

If PE is central to health, then PE teachers are vital to aid this transaction. Secondary schools do tend to have PE specialists but that is not the case in most primary schools, which is when children are in a key age range for forming habits. Harris (2013) cites that PE teacher education is not adequately preparing future PE teachers to promote healthy, active lifestyles and is not addressing previously identified issues in health-related teaching and learning. 'PE teachers may lack both the requisite health knowledge and appropriate PE-for-health pedagogies' (Armour and Harris, 2013, p.207). Boyle et al (2008) found that Head teachers recognised the contribution of PE to health, but it was seen as recreational rather than academic. Boyle et al (2008) also observed that schools have no social environment to promote activity. It is not only teachers that can promote healthy lifestyles through physical activity, Hellstedt's (1987) framework identifies the influence of teammates, coaches and parents on development and psychological performance of such practice.



However, Harris et al (2016) argues that despite Health being in the PE curriculum it does not necessarily change the practice of children. This is supported in a study by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (2015) which found only 21% of boys and 16% of girls (aged 5-15) achieve the daily hour of physical exercise. Harris et al (2016), cites the reason for this includes teaching, culture and the health messages themselves affecting pupil's concept of the link between health and PE. Health may actually not be a driver for physical exercise in children which could more likely be enjoyment or a belief in one's own ability in such exercise (Strauss et al, 2001). Benefits from PE are not necessarily limited to physical health as there is also evidence that PE has a positive effect upon brain structure and mental health (Donnelly et al, 2016).

However, as previously mentioned, there is conflicting evidence regarding the impact PE has upon health and a healthy lifestyle. According to Gallotta (2010) and Strong et al (2005) participation in physical activity on a regular basis improves a child's physical and mental health. It is suggested that PE interventions can be cumulative over a period of time (McKenzie et al, 2004) and physical activity intervention programmes can improve fitness (Eather et al, 2012). There is also conflicting evidence that fitness tests in PE do not promote healthy lifestyles or motivate pupils for active lifestyles (Cale and Harris, 2009). Successful performance can lead to a strong athletic identity and this can form positive psychological outcomes with regard to lower anxiety, higher self- confidence and positive body image (Horton and Mack, 2000). However, failure in performance can be ominously related with depression (Hammond et al, 2013). Mental health is also an area cited as a positive consequence of participation in physical activity (Siegel, 2006; Weir, 2008; Carter and Micheli, 2012). This could well be the case for many pupils participating in PE and most studies concur with this synopsis, but a small number of studies warn of caution in the relationship between PE and mental health. Bloodworth and McNamee (2009) suggest that it could possibly be detrimental to self- perception, a theme which is also captured by Hills (2007) who found it could lead to humiliation and exclusion. Therefore, in such circumstances it could have a negative impact on mental health. Quennerstedt (2008) goes as far as to argue that from a salutogenic perspective, pupils should not participate in PE at school.

Even for those deemed to be the most able, there is evidence that the intense physical activity undertaken by elite young athletes can adversely affect mental health (Daley, 2008; Hamer et al, 2009). Stress in young elite athletes can lead to depression and other psychological disorders (Frank et al, 2015). The risk period for mental disorder onset and elite athlete competitive years coincides, leading to increased risk of depression (Gulliver et al, 2012a). Female athletes were more likely than their male counterparts or non-athletes of both genders to suffer depression and anxiety (Gulliver et al, 2012b). Therefore, the assumption that PE is good for health is not necessarily true for all participants or in all contexts.

Childhood obesity is a concern with children increasingly having a sedentary lifestyle (Shropshire et al, 1997; Trudeau and Shephard, 2005), especially in North America and Europe (Birtwistle and Brodie, 1991) and they do not have much high intensity physical exercise (Gilliam et al, 1981; Birtwistle and Brodie, 1991; Great Britain,

2015). A study in the USA revealed that the number of overweight children has nearly doubled within two decades (Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007) and in the England a third of children (2-15 age range) are overweight or obese (HSCIC, 2013; Massion et al, 2016). PE could be a vehicle to address childhood obesity (Prochaska et al, 2003) and there is evidence to support this (Datar and Sturm, 2004). The UK Government views PE as a positive way of combating childhood obesity through children having a more active lifestyle (Great Britain, 2015). The Government introduced the PE and sport premium into primary schools in March 2013 to support such participation in physical activity (HM Government, 2020a). They are investing a further £320m in academic year 20/21 (HM Government, 2020a). This funding is for support for all children. However, this issue of weight is more nuanced, as for instance adolescent children from upper middle-class families are half as likely be overweight than their counterparts from low socio-economic families (Azzarito and Solman, 2009).

The relationship between physical activity and weight, on the surface, seems to be a positive one. It appears that exercise can be a tool to arrest obesity in society (Starc and Strel, 2012) and numerous media outlets such as magazines, newspapers, TV etc. promote physical activity as a way to lose weight (Evans, 2003). However, who defines if someone is overweight? This tends to be a social construction which is open to social interpretation (Evans, 2003). The language associated with 'weight' can be quite negative and this in turn can have negative consequences on how people deemed to be overweight are treated by society (Gard and Wright, 2001; Quennerstedt, 2019). This can then lead to self-esteem damage and self-obsession about body image with people deemed by society to be overweight (Evans, 2003; Garret, 2004; Hills, 2007).

There can be confusion between being overweight and obesity. Obesity is defined as having a BMI of 30kg/m<sup>2</sup> or above (WHO, 1998). However, overweight can be a term applied to children meaning obese even if they do not meet the definition (Brownell, 1995a). Overweight is socially constructed whereas obese has the science of excess body fat to give it some credence (Evans, 2003). However, even obesity is imprecise with no defined agreement of at what juncture health is affected by excess weight (Brownell, 1995; Evans, 2003). Therefore, policies and practice surrounding health can be socio-cultural and constructed by professionals in the field (Evans, 2003). In turn such policies that focus upon diet and weight can affect children negatively (Evans et al, 2002). The self-esteem of children can be adversely affected if they are labelled obese or overweight (Hann, 2002) and health damage such as depression can occur from such categorisation (Ritenbaugh, 1982). Although obesity can threaten the health of children (Kumanyika et al, 2002) conditions that cause a sedentary life may mean being overweight is not a cause of illness but a symptom (Evans, 2003).

In summary, the link between PE and health on the surface seems to be obvious and straight forward. World leading bodies such as the WHO reinforce the link between physical activity and health and well-being. However, it is more nuanced in the PE classroom, as well as being good for physical and mental health, PE could also be detrimental to mental health due to draining self-esteem and censure. It could also be detrimental to pupil participation in physical

activity. Even with regard to weight, PE is not straight forward due to the socially constructed nature of the definition, and negative consequences for those deemed to have a socially unacceptable weight.

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework-Social Field Theory**

### ***2.4.1 Theoretical Framework driven by findings***

The interpretation of the findings in this study uses a theoretical framework to give credence to and ground the subsequent recommendations in a wider body of knowledge. This philosophical method is not in the realm of pupil voice but the domain of adult voice which is contrary to the methodological stance of the study. However, in order to mitigate and ensure the continued flow and drive of pupil voice, a theoretical framework was not sought prior to the study, as this would have significantly increased adult voice influence. Instead, the findings created by pupil voice instigated the most appropriate theoretical framework in which to interpret meaning in the academic sphere. This approach provided authority through legitimacy and structure, but still ensured pupil voice propelling direction. Ultimately it legitimises said pupil voice, as making the study robust theoretically means it is more likely to be listened to in debate within the field, which in turn will propagate pupil voice.

Social field theory appeared to be the theoretical framework most suited to understanding and interpreting the findings from the pupils (see section 2.4.3). Other theories were considered such as Foucault's (1980) power relations, with certain groups establishing power over others with pressure for pupils to conform to the norm. The scrutiny and surveillance of bodies and skills in PE like no other subject (Cameron and Humbert, 2020) lends itself to Foucault's (1977) concept of the gaze. Webb et al's (2004) analysis of Foucault's gaze implies that 'subjects being watched or who felt they were being watched internalised the gazes and regulated their behaviours and identities toward a norm' (p.210). However, although the gaze is prominent in this research and power relations exist, the findings suggest that although some pupils do, many do not regulate behaviours towards a norm, quite the contrary in some cases.

The concept of agency theory could also potentially have been a lens through which to interpret the findings. There is a tension in these findings between the autonomous and agentic states (Milgram, 1974). In the autonomous mental state agency theory suggests that we perceive ourselves as responsible for our own behaviour, whereas in the agentic state we perceive ourselves as the agent of the will of an authority figure commanding us and they are responsible for what we do (ibid). Teachers are clearly perceived as authority figures and therefore many of the pupils' responses cited that '*it's up to the teachers*' and that '*they decide*'. However, the power relationships and resultant experiences were wider than agency. They permeated physique, skills, ability construction, dispositions and social assets. Therefore, social field theory seemed more appropriate as a theoretical framework to substantiate and interpret the findings.

### *2.4.2 What is Social Field Theory?*

People can be ‘defined in and by a community of practice which can also define relations within that structure’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.53). It can be argued that this definition is formed on the basis of the social field theory of Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu developed his social field theory to explain the reproductions of social hierarchies in society. It is a social and cultural theory that can be applied to power relations in society (Burkett, 2004) and the educational achievement of people from different socio-economic backgrounds (Robbins, 2005). The continued social exclusion created, and subsequent social inequality reproduced were explained by this social field theory (Burkett, 2004; Robbins, 2005). Bourdieu’s theory is conveyed through the concepts of field, habitus, capital and doxa (Grenfell, 2006). Habitus is a concept shaped by personal and collective dispositions as well class, race and gender predispositions and ‘is both a structuring and structured structure’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p.70). This takes place in a setting known as a field which has certain rules, hierarchies of power and social relations. In this study, the field is the PE lesson or sporting activity outside of school.

Bourdieu intended such concepts to assist contemporary empirical research (Peillon, 1998) and support the interpretation actions and relations between individuals, groups and communities.

#### *Habitus*

Bourdieu defined habitus as the dispositions of a person which can be realised through their behaviours and perceptions. Habitus of a person relates to their beliefs, actions, appearance, ideals and characteristics which have been shaped through their interactions with institutions i.e., school, friends, peers, family and other social agents (Bourdieu, 1972/1977; 1984). If such habitus is valued in the field with which a person is engaged then this contributes to acknowledgement as being deemed to be able (Hay and MacDonald, 2010b).

The way a person acts and appears to others is their embodied habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). Such habitus is socially constructed through interactions with others and experiences they have undergone in a range of social contexts reflecting their individual and social history set in the circumstances and environments of such accumulation (Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). The degree of awareness of such habitus tends to operate in the sub-conscious realm (ibid).

#### *Fields*

Fields are arenas both institutional and social where people compete for capital and express and reproduce dispositions (Bourdieu, 1986; Gaventa, 2003). They are social interaction sites where values and beliefs are constructed through practices and relationships (Wacquant, 1989). The field conditions and structures the habitus but

also the habitus cognitively constructs the field to make sense and give meaning to this world (Wacquant, 1989). Fields are a structure with a set of relationships which could be in any area including education (Bourdieu, 1986; Navarro, 2006). The context of each field and its environment is important and influences habitus to an extent where experiences of individuals may be different depending upon what field they are in at any one time (Gaventa, 2003). In the example of a school, habitus and therefore experience for an individual in a PE lesson may differ from that in a science lesson. The boundary of the field is where the effects of that field on an individual relent.

### *Capital*

Capital is another element to Bourdieu's theory and is interconnected with habitus and field. Capital is defined as the personal resources individuals have (composed in their habitus) and how, depending on the field, they can lead to privilege or marginalisation and can be traded or acquired (Bourdieu, 1986). Within this theory there are three forms of capital-social, economic and cultural. These can be traded for mutual benefits between individuals. Economic capital is related to the financial position of an individual. Social capital is about networks, connections, interpersonal skills which give opportunity and support the acquisition and trading of other capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is about the fluency of an individual with the overarching culture in society or an individual field and use of language to reflect this culture (Sullivan, 2001). Bourdieu (1986) cited three forms of cultural capital, being the institutionalised state (mainly educational qualifications), the objectified state (valued cultural possessions) and the embodied state (appearance and actions). Capital can also be traded across boundaries with Evans (2004) and Hay and MacDonald (2010b) arguing that that in PE physical appearance can be traded for ability recognition. Nowotny (1981) argued for another category of emotional capital which could also be traded in this manner, for example, in a field where emotion mattered. The field legitimises and dictates what forms of capital can operate and are valued by the social agents in the field. Bourdieu (1986) argues that 'cultural products' such as everyday life including education, judgements, values and methods shape social order in people's minds. This creates an unconscious acceptance of social differences and hierarchy and can lead to self-exclusion (ibid).

Such social order can be present in the PE class as well as a sporting club outside of school. The development of the body can create physical capital in a field. Such concepts can be used to assess the construction of physicality in a social setting (Shilling, 1993; Gorely et al., 2003; Hunter, 2004). The body is central to physical capital and procuring other forms of capital (Shilling, 1993; 2004). Such physical capital can be powerful in certain contexts (Shilling, 1993) and in the PE field this embodiment can be linked to competence and ability (Bourdieu, 1986; Evans, 2003; Hills 2007).

## *Doxa*

Bourdieu (1984) describes the concept of Doxa as the common sense or taken for granted assumptions that create social order and are seen as self-evident. These are in essence the rules of the game and tend to favour those in power in that field. Thus, in PE the rules of the game favour those with physique and technical ability and contribute to the conditions of the field and habitus. Changing these 'rules' to not favour such attributes would be hard to do as it would mean the powerful agents in the field relinquishing power. The culture of an area creates the social processes that embed the taken for granted assumptions into the social realm, described by Bourdieu as 'misrecognition' (Gaventa, 2003). The culture gives the power within the field legitimacy and the individuals who fit the habitus that exists or is created become the most powerful agents self-sustaining the culture which creates the 'social differences and unequal structures' (Navarro, 2006, p.19)

## *Powerful Agents*

The individuals with most relevant capital and habitus to the field are the most powerful agents. They can dictate the doxa (rules of the game) and can reproduce and continue their advantage. Agents having similar conditions and occupying similar positions can have similar dispositions (Bourdieu, 1989). Those pupils with physical capital, connections and engagement with sport beyond the PE classroom can therefore form a powerful group of agents dictating doxa. Habitus implies, 'a sense of one's place' but also 'a sense of the place of others' (Bourdieu, 1989, p.19). This can then lead to pupils accepting a position and status in class based upon perceived ability (Hay and Macdonald, 2010b). Thus, habitus, capital and powerful agents can shape perceptions of pupils in a field such as the PE class (ibid). Therefore, ability can be based upon the development of the appropriate habitus and the perception of others in particular the powerful agents (Bourdieu, 1986, Evans 2004).

### ***2.4.3 Relevance of study to Social Field Theory***

The rationale for selecting social field theory as the theoretical framework for this study lies in the fact that the findings produced by pupil voice seem to embody characteristics such as habitus, capital, field and doxa. Although this is about children regardless of status or gender, some of the differences between certain groups in the themes can be categorised in terms of power, gender, ability and socioeconomics. Once again social field theory is applicable to such categories. Eminent researchers in the PE arena such as John Evans use social field theory to explain ability construction in this subject area. Therefore, these factors suggested a convergence of application of social field theory to this study.

### *Education, PE and Social Field Theory*

Grenfell (2006) argues that Bourdieu's field theory can illuminate research in education. He feels that although not an automatic choice it offers insights into educational phenomena that are both observable in other approaches.

Maton (2014) suggests that practice is a consequence of association between a person's dispositions (habitus), position through networks and relationships (capital) and the social arena (field). The concepts only make sense when related to each other and practice (Smith, 2020).

[(habitus)(capital)] +field=practice (Bourdieu, 1977b; 1984)

Due to such a link practice can affect vocational habitus which is an extension of the work of Bourdieu concerned with realised and idealised dispositions that pupils orientate to through their experiences (Colley et al, 2003). It develops a sense of how to be or behave (ibid). The habitus of the powerful agents can cause the learner to aspire to a certain combination of dispositions within the subject (Colley et al, 2003; Bathmaker, 2015). Those who do not reflect said dispositions become isolated and on the periphery. Such structure can combine to produce and reproduce social inequalities (Sullivan, 2002; Colley et al, 2003; Bathmaker, 2015).

Within the PE setting there are labels, happenings and practices that are immanent and, in a sense, 'waiting to happen' (Colley et al, 2003, p.478). This is the 'subjective expectation of objective probability' (Bourdieu, 1982). Bourdieu would argue that the social construction in PE lessons is only to a small part the pedagogic actions and 'it is to a large extent the automatic, agentless effect of a physical and social order entirely organised in accordance with the androcentric principle which explains the extreme strength of its hold' (Bourdieu, 2001 p.24). The habitus that some children bring to PE is not sufficient enough to hold any status in that world and they may not have any capital to trade to increase said status in the field. To move beyond this familiar habitus to an unknown state would mean cultural capital is stretched beyond its limits (Vincent and Ball, 2006). Parents may also not have the cultural capital to support their children requiring capital such as knowledge, economics, material resources and emotional capital

### *Class and Education/PE*

It can be argued that 'the subordination of the education system to the economic system means the education system exists as a structure for the reproduction of class' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p.178-179). Hunter (2004) argues that Bourdieu suggests that schools are all about inequality and they indeed reproduce this for the next generation.

The choices and tastes of the working-class pupils could well fit in to the 'choice of the necessary' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.58). Bourdieu argues that the real tenet of our inclinations is taste and for working-class families, this is a virtue made of necessity (Deeming, 2014). Thus, working class pupil choices are made because that is all that is available

to them, such as the local leisure centre or church hall to undertake PE/Sport outside of school. Class, family background and gender can all combine to predispose pupils into certain sports, no sports or courses of action and roles within sports. A 'sense' of one's proper place can emerge apparently organically, but it is always socially constructed which is a sense of the 'right way' to be and to behave in the workplace (Bourdieu, 1977a) or PE setting as in this case. Pupils can allude to a process of subtle class distinction (Bourdieu, 1986; Colley et al, 2003) with physical and material appearance being signifiers of social status (Bourdieu, 1986, Skeggs, 1997).

### *Gender and PE*

Hunter (2004) argues that judgements of the ideal pupil in PE centre around masculine qualities. As a result, some girls in particular can struggle in that environment and feel less confident and more discomfort. Peers may also strongly influence girls with regard to desirable physicality and deducing their own experience (Hills, 2007). Peer culture in both genders can also strongly influence the social norms in PE (Dononvan, 2003). It is therefore imperative for the most powerful agent (PE teacher) to foster inclusiveness and positive peer support (Hills, 2007). Female relationships can be quite important in the association between girls and PE. Friendship groups can orchestrate and mediate experiences of physicality in girls (ibid). In some instances, girls can thrive and become competent in this environment which enhances confidence and turns physical capital in to social capital (Hills, 2007). In such a situation, popular and skilled girls dominate PE and can exclude others (ibid). Public scrutiny and evaluation of bodies in PE can also be a factor that hinders girls' confidence in ability in PE and affects their participation (Hills, 2007).

Hay and MacDonald (2010a) found that in order for girls to be perceived as able they needed to act in a hegemonic manner or possess valuable cultural or physical capital that transcended genders. Such capital was acknowledged and bolstered by the most powerful agents in the PE field (ibid). In these circumstances it can be hard for females to feel talented or see themselves as part of PE (Mendick, 2005). Hay and MacDonald (2010a) suggested that gender neutral PE could help this situation but in reality, the curriculum was far less responsible for this compared with the attitudes and beliefs of PE teachers. The judgements about the ability of pupils by PE teachers and their relationships with pupils were also a big influence on creation of this environment (ibid).

### *Ability and PE*

Evans (2004) utilised Bourdieu's theory as an alternative way to biological and psychological means to conceptualise ability in PE. Rather than see it as innate capacity and chances for expression (Sternberg, 1998) he suggested that habitus could be perceived as ability if it had value in the field. Thus, the structuring elements of the



field (Bourdieu, 1989) allowed for physical, cultural and social capital in the form of appearance, relationships, standing which are embodied in habitus to be comprehended as ability (Evans, 2004). This identification of ability could act as cultural capital which in turn could be traded for high grades (ibid).

The construction of ability was dependent upon the field and social, physical and cultural capital embodied in habitus (Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). The body in particular, including appearance and disposition, is significant in its contribution to physical capital and aiding some pupils (Evans and Penney, 2008). This in turn privileged those deemed high ability through this construction and limited and marginalised those deemed low ability, giving them little opportunity to acquire or display relevant high value capital (Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). Hunter (2004) found competent display, indicators of fitness, body image (not fat), healthy appearance and being a good pupil could influence perception of ability and position in subject. Such physical capital (appearance, performance etc.) gave these pupils the educational opportunities as well as the ability recognition not afforded to other participants (Evans and Penney, 2008). Other social and cultural capital were also valued although the degree of influence was related to the weight of said capital in the social arena of the field (Bourdieu, 1989; Evans and Penney, 2008; Hay and MacDonald, 2010b)

In PE, the defining characteristics of a field include the curriculum, rules, attire, pedagogy and values and beliefs of PE teachers and PE pupils (Evans, 2004). The PE curriculum was a key element to the structure of the field giving official practice in the PE class and constructing ability expectations (Evans and Penney, 2008). These structuring elements of the field assign disposition to pupils in terms of ability (Evans, 2004). Such ability construction privileges some pupils and marginalises others. Those constructed to be high ability gain further capital such as praise, value and high grades whereas those constructed to be low ability can receive criticism, blame and low grades (Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). In this sense capitals could be traded to alleviate poor performance, but only for those possessing such valued capital. Equally pupils with physical capital but without the social capital or embodied habitus to reflect such physical capital could also be restricted in opportunity to demonstrate high ability and consequently not recognised as such (Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). Thus, the social structures and methods of operation in the field reinforce its structure and rewards those that adhere with capital which on a conscious or sub conscious level can be traded for ability and grade acknowledgment (Bourdieu, 1990; Evans 2004; Hay and MacDonald, 2010b).

The beliefs and values of the most powerful agents in the PE field (usually the teachers) influence the practices in the field and the expectations of what a good or able pupil is and consequently what one is not. Those pupils who reflect such values then reinforce these practices and gain ability recognition from the powerful agents and as a result subsequently from other players in the field (Evans 2004). This implication of ability construction is much more complex than traditional notions based upon inherent and developmental notions (Miah and Rich, 2006). Although, traditional notions of ability are not necessarily completely ignored but they stand alongside social field

factors and can be influenced strongly by them both valuing or devaluing ability (Evans, 2004; Hay and MacDonald, 2010b).

#### ***2.4.4 Application of Social Field Theory to this Study***

The actions, events and experiences of PE as described so vividly by Pupil Voice in the data and findings resonate with social field theory. Therefore, this theoretical framework was chosen to interpret and explain the interactions, decisions and relationships that create the culture within the PE lesson. Although Bourdieu's work is focussed upon hierarchy and class privilege in society, on a micro level PE has its own privilege, class and hierarchical system. It has practitioners with privileged dispositions (*habitus*) who have created the current structures which create inequality. Such practitioners continue to reinforce and reproduce such structures to continue the benefits to themselves. There is capital to be traded within this PE lesson (*field*) which although not as dependent upon economic capital as the societal class system as defined in Bourdieu's world, is every much as precious a commodity in this PE field. Capital such as physique, the social capital that can be integral to teams and the cultural capital of ability and accessories are very desired commodities and can be traded for influence if pupils are fortunate enough to possess them. Economic capital can play some role in having the necessary gear and equipment and accessing opportunities in the community for sport participation that virtually always have a financial cost. There are also distinct rules of the game (*doxa*) that are put in place and enforced by the powerful agents (teachers). Such agents have all benefited from these rules in the past and either do not want to or cannot see any reason to change the rules to support other groups and therefore continue a system that favours the group who reflect their *habitus*.

This theoretical framework was deployed as a method when interpreting and analysing the findings of the pupils. *Habitus*, capital, field, *doxa* and powerful agents are key concepts utilised in the discussion section relating to the themes derived from the findings. Alongside other literature in the discipline, it helped to ground pupil voice from the findings into a wider theoretical base and suggest explanation for behaviours and events which take part in PE lessons. In order to hear and listen to pupil voice it is essential to understand the reasons for the actions, dynamics and relationships in the PE lesson. By rationalising the behaviours using a theoretical base, it is easier to present knowledge, understanding and subsequent solutions to schools, policymakers and the academic community to influence future policy and practice within the subject discipline.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

‘Well, they’re skinnier than me’ (Elaine, SS)

This chapter describes the methodological approach to the study and the methods used to generate and analyse data. The view of what knowledge is in relation to this study and where such knowledge lies and how it can be found will be outlined. It explains the research process as it unfolded and the rationale behind decisions made and the pathway that was followed. It gives consideration to factors such as my own positionality and the degree of influence of such. It also outlines the objective of staying as true as possible to pupil voice and attempting to limit adult voice and the implications of this for the research design.

### **3.1 Introduction**

The founders of philosophy are usually acknowledged to be Socrates and Plato. From their time approx. 500BC debate has raged about the nature of meaning and knowledge. The philosophical stance of this study is predicated on where the knowledge lies in order to give meaning to the investigation. The pathway to such knowledge needs to be valid in order to legitimise the meaning. This study is about pupil voice in relation to young people’s experiences, thoughts, opinions and feelings with regard to PE, primarily in school, but also in the community. It aims to exclude adult voice (as far as possible) to allow children to identify the issues, challenges and benefits of participation in PE. The input and data that they provide drives the research project and hence the findings acknowledge their authentic voice in their setting. Thus, the methodological approach is generated based on these principles and reflects the nature of knowledge and understanding as constructed in this context and process.

### **3.2 Paradigm, Epistemology and Ontology**

#### **3.2.1 *Paradigm***

A research paradigm is a model to generate knowledge (Higgs, 2001) and a set of assumptions or beliefs about the world (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). It provides a framework in order to structure and understand a research strategy. Although the debate over the most appropriate methods of social science have developed over many years (Wellington, 2000), there is no essential definition due to multiple uses and meanings that surround methods and strategies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). In essence there are a range of methods and approaches which can be used in various ways and in different combinations without there being a hierarchy of methods in social science. Qualitative research seeks to investigate social phenomena in normal situations (Teherani et al, 2015). Such phenomena can include the behaviour of individuals and groups, experiences of people’s lives and relationship

interactions (ibid). The researcher is the data collection mechanism and examines issues such as the meaning of certain events for the participants studied (Bogdan and Biklen, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Qualitative research approaches draw on a range of interpretive activities but has no methods, paradigm or theory that would be classed as uniquely its own (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). Qualitative research approaches take the socially constructed nature of reality as a starting point and gives value descriptions of the social world (ibid). It locates the researcher in that world and ‘makes the world visible’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.3). Qualitative research points towards personal interpretation and holistic phenomena and away from cause and effect (Schwandt, 1994). The nature of this study, which explores pupils’ experiences of PE, is congruent with qualitative research. The study will analyse person centred data exploring participants’ feelings, emotions and opinions which constitutes a qualitative approach (Silverman, 2000).

Research design supports the validity of the findings of the study (Hedges, 2012), within the overall ontological framework (see section 3.2.2). The structure of which needs to allow ‘the collection of valid data leading to valid interpretation and creating valid knowledge’ (Wellington et al, 2005, p.100). The validity concerns of this study focus on how pupils experience, act and think about themselves and the world around them. A qualitative study focuses on describing, observing, interpreting and analysing such activity and events (Bazeley, 2013). Therefore, the design of the research adopts a qualitative approach within an interpretivist paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm seeks to unlock the social world (Higgs, 2001) and assumes that knowledge is constructed by human beings through practices and interaction (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivism encompasses a wide range of qualitative approaches which illuminate the meaning of situations and events for the people who have experienced them (Wellington, 2000; Gomm, 2009). The nature of this study adopts an interpretivist philosophy as it is rooted in social phenomena and requires an understanding of the social world, constructed by participants (Wellington 2000; Blaikie, 2007). Theory will be derived in an anti-positivist manner and will follow research deriving from meanings that give insight and understanding to people’s behaviour (Cohen et al, 2007).

### ***3.2.2 Ontology and Epistemology***

Ontology is concerned with the nature of things, the nature of reality and how people see the world whether it be independent and external, or socially constructed, subjective and the result of human thought (Wellington et al, 2005). The ontological assumption underpinning qualitative research is that there is not an external reality that is purely objective, but that reality can only be understood through our social understandings. In this study reality is constructed, subjective, multiple and relative. Constructions are not more or less true, only more or less informed. Analysis in this study is contextually situated and the meanings constructed are specific to the settings. The reality is constructed by individuals and groups, there is no single truth so ontology is less realist and more idealist, situated in relativism where reality is constructed which can lead to many truths which can be local and specific.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge such as how we know, where does knowledge come from and what constitutes knowledge (Wellington et al, 2005). Knowledge in this study is ‘experienced, personal and subjective’ (ibid, p.102). In this study the nature of knowledge is such that the knower and the known are interactively linked, findings are created as the research proceeds. The epistemology of phenomenology is revealing meaning through the knowers (pupils). Phenomenology, which is addressed in section 3.3, has the aim of ‘understanding an individual’s lived experience rather than finding a universal truth’ (Cal and Tehmarn, 2016 p.2). In PE this lived experience occurs in a social setting and is constructed not only by the individual but also by their interactions with others and shared understandings. Social constructivism involves the construction of knowledge and of shared interpretations (Stake, 1995; Blaikie, 2007), which represent the nature of knowledge in this study.

Applying a relativist ontology and interpretive social constructivist epistemology aligns with the concepts and context of this study. It is a relativist ontology as pupils have different experiences depending on their viewpoint which fits with their view of reality and hence there are many truths. The epistemology is social constructed as the knowledge is value rich, subjective and is constructed through experience and social interaction. Social constructivism recognises individual agency in making meaning from a relativist and interpretive world view and can blur what is reality (ontology) and how do we know (epistemology) with a strong dependency between them (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Groen et al, 2017). Such epistemology and ontology underpin the phenomenological approach as the knowledge custodians are the pupils, with the meaning of knowledge being relative and based upon their lived experience and interactions with others in a social setting.

### **3.3 Research Methodology**

In order to execute a valid and reliable investigation, a research strategy and methodology must be embedded in the epistemological framework of the study from the beginning. A methodology is concerned with choosing, justifying and evaluating the methods used in a study (Wellington, 2000). Although a range of approaches and stances could be taken, the most appropriate for the research must be sought allowing for the fact that such strategies are ‘neither right nor wrong’ (Denscombe, 1998, p.3). Different researchers can set about methodologies in different ways as they have differing perspectives and techniques (Wellington et al, 2005). Methodologies are a guide to inform rather than a set of rules to follow (Dey, 2004) and studies need to show they are informed by it but are ‘not a slave to it’ (Bazeley, 2013, p.10). Key to a robust conclusion are the steps followed to ascertain the results (Bazeley, 2013). Some researchers’ preference the quality of the research findings over the approach (Corbin, 2009) and feel researchers need to be flexible with the methodology to fit the setting (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Although,

Thorne (2008) cautions about the dangers of too much modifying leading to a loss of research standard, as the approach is important in order to demonstrate the rigor of the process.

The nature of this study initially suggested a Grounded Theory approach, with no preconceived ideas. Grounded theories provide meaning and enhance understanding of phenomenon by emerging from the data collected (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Such theories develop logically and systematically through concepts and categories and are constructed (ibid). From the epistemological and ontological standpoint of this study, grounded theory corresponds with the relativist nature of knowledge, which is social constructed, subjective and interpretative (Chamez, 2014; Groen et al, 2017). However, there were a number of reasons why this study did not acquiesce to a grounded theory approach. For example, ideally the situation would have enabled pupils just to talk about their experiences, feelings, thoughts and opinions without any external stimulus. Although the initial data collection (Focus Groups) began with an open question to ascertain their thoughts, feelings and experiences I anticipated it would be difficult for children to start debating their experiences in PE without scaffolding and a framework giving a stimulus to conversation. It proved to be the case that the children needed scaffolding and structure to enable their feelings to be released and captured, in the form of some prompt questions drawn from the literature. Therefore, a brief literature review was undertaken to stimulate initial debate. The process deployed and justification for having pre-pupil voice and post-pupil voice driven theory can be found in Chapter 2. This study did have an initial aim and meaning set at the beginning which was accessing the experiences and views of young people in PE and sport, and this is not then the blank canvas of grounded theory as set out by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Thus, although it shares some similarities with the grounded theory approach it could not use a grounded theory methodology.

The children provided the themes and quality assured the survey questionnaire for accuracy, however, this study is not participatory nor co-production as I designed the research methodology, aims, process and methods and collected all the data. Although the data is a product of the research process (Charmaz, 2008), the experiences of the children created the phenomenon and such phenomenon drove the direction of the research. Swanson-Kauffman and Schonwald (1988) encapsulate phenomenology as the description and understanding of lived experiences, which have been described in this study through pupil voice. Therefore, as explained in more detail below, a phenomenological approach, which underpins the relativist ontology and social constructivist epistemology, was chosen as the design for this study.

Phenomenology can be defined as:

‘an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it. The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of this experience—both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced.’ (Neubauer et al, 2019, p.91)

Phenomenology is concerned with the study of direct experience in which the causal effect of behaviour is determined by the phenomena of experience (Cohen et al, 2007). This study will be capturing perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, emotions and meanings of its participants which are aspects of phenomenology (Denscombe, 1998). Participants use actions and interpretations to make sense of their world and this study relies upon such human experience. Therefore, due to the nature of this study, examining experiences of pupils in PE, phenomenology is the most appropriate strategy to ascertain meaning and understanding of their world.

Different versions of phenomenology have developed following the foundational work of Bretano and Husserl (Denscombe, 1998; Blaikie, 2007). Denscombe (1998) asserts that the simplest way to view these versions is to categorise them into two main types: the European tradition and the North American tradition. The main focus of the American tradition derives from the social phenomenology design of Alfred Schutz (1962, 1967). It is concerned with how people give meaning to their experiences (Denscombe, 1998) but also incorporates social interaction (ibid). Given the nature of this study examining PE in a school, social interaction will influence individual experience. Schutz (1962) denotes that people create social reality based upon the socio-cultural structures that already exist. He asserts that humans tend to categorise people to type in order understand them and society. This then dictates how people interact with one another in the social world. Relating phenomenology to social science and in this setting of the PE lesson, the experiences of the pupils can be shared but their individual consciousness is still unique. The settings in which PE lessons are undertaken are forged from predecessors who can have preconceived ideas and perceptions of ability, physique and what PE is about (Evans 2004; Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). Therefore, the phenomenon of the PE lesson is the experiences of individuals, influenced by social interactions within a socio-cultural structure of preconceived ideas of PE.

Schutz (1962, 1967) was strongly influenced by Husserl’s work and related phenomenology to social science. Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology is based on the intertwining of subjective and objective knowledge (Neubauer et al, 2019). He believed in the inner evidence of the consciousness (Husserl, 1970) including emotion and thought as well as other sensory mechanisms (Reiners, 2012). In Husserl’s view, ‘To understand the reality of a phenomenon is to understand the phenomenon as it is lived by a person’ (Neubauer et al, 2019, p.93). It is a key component of transcendental phenomenology that, ‘the researcher must be vigilant in his/her bracketing work so that

the researcher's individual subjectivity does not bias data analysis and interpretations' (ibid). This is a critical aspect of this study, to ensure that pupil voice is captured and propagated describing their real living experience, thus limiting the influence of adult voice (see section 3.4.1).

This study is purely about pupil voice, outlining their real-life experiences while bracketing those of adult voice (including the researcher). It also involves the social interactions of the PE class in a school setting with the pre-existing socio-cultural structures. Therefore, the social phenomenology of Schutz incorporating the bracketing component of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology convey knowledge, meaning and understanding of the reality of the phenomenon. This social transcendental variation of phenomenology is, consequently, an appropriate methodological approach for this study.

### **3.4 Method**

Having established the phenomenological approach as the appropriate methodology, the method to undertake the study was then devised. I did consider the case study approach with two distinct settings, however, given the study was about the experiences of pupils and was driven by pupils, the strategy of inquiry necessary to apply to the method was that of Pupil Voice.

The rights of the child to have a voice, to be heard and participate in decision making regarding areas that affect them are enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989). Schools do tend to seek voice but due to culture, hierarchical structures and power relations such attempts can be flawed leaving true voice to be ignored, unheard or marginalised (Robinson and Taylor, 2013). Ultimately, the voice of children is important (Lundy, 2007) and original whatever they choose to say, because it is their unique voice and they have not been asked to use it in this context before. This is the premise for this study.

In order to engage with pupil voice, adults need to hear and listen (Robinson, 2011; Enright and O'Sullivan, 2012; Cook-Sather, 2015). Engaging with pupil voice requires hearing their voice, then listening to what they are saying and repeatedly acting upon their words and following through with their suggestions (Wilson and Corbett, 2001; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Cook-Sather, 2006). Pupil voice is not a tokenistic process (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006) but is about what pupils think and feel without the influence of adults. I need to be cognisant of the hierarchical nature of teacher-pupil relationships and the power and cultural norms within them (Robinson and Taylor, 2013). These by extension can be transferred to another adult from another academic institution such as a university (Robinson, 2011) and trying to minimise or even eradicate this is critical to allow voice to be free. Such power relationships can be quite complex and not overt but can constrain pupil voice (ibid). Equally important for



the focus group aspect of the study is moderating any pupil-pupil power relationships which may have been created in school social interactions and norms (Haugaard, 2012; Robinson and Taylor, 2013). This includes ensuring opportunity for all involved to speak and not allowing dominance of more confident and articulate pupils (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006). It is enabling multiple voices to be listened to regardless of status in the school or within the peer group (Grace, 1995; Silva, 2001; Robinson and Taylor, 2007).

Pupil voice is about 'listening to the opinions, needs and concerns' (Robinson, 2011, p.437) of pupils so whatever the pupils think, feel and say is pupil voice and therefore it is important in its own right. They are the ones experiencing PE and out of school sporting environments (if they are involved with them). Adults are not better at knowing what pupils feel or experience (Hall and Martellos, 1996; Jayman, 2020) and do not make sense of pupils' lives in their terms (Shotter, 1993), therefore, pupils know what they feel and do not need to be told how they should feel (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002). Whether that voice is listened to then depends upon the adults that surround them, so it is impossible to define this study in terms of their active involvement in their own education from a design, structural and formal perspective as they and I do not have that power in school. It should have such influence as the schools willingly engaged with the project acknowledging the learning potential in terms of their pedagogy and practice, but there are no guarantees of that. However, providing that voice with a platform for expression is crucial and this research aims to do that.

Given these constraints my definition of voice in this study (drawing from literature in Chapter 2) and subsequent method of inquiry is based upon:

- Pupils determining the focus of the research into PE (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006)
- What pupils think, know and feel (Graham, 1995)
- Requirement for participation and democratic inclusivity (Robinson and Taylor, 2007)
- Pupils being authentic participants central to the research process (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007).
- Awareness of inequality of power relations and addressing this issue (Robinson and Taylor, 2007; Robinson, 2011).

Applying such a method can enable voice to inform policy, practice and management. The more vibrant that voice becomes and the platforms it is given, can create the conditions and opportunities to influence.

Pupil voice is not spoken with one chord, there are a range of individual voices. This study attempts to capture a range of voices in their situation. It involves boys, girls, able, less able, different social backgrounds, a state school

and an independent school. The purpose is to hear their voice in their own situation as is real to them. Voice will be then shared with the two schools to influence their development. Given both schools are voluntarily involved in the project then it is hoped that they are more disposed to listening to the voice.

Thus, a pupil voice approach is the most appropriate method for this study and uses inductive logic to discover knowledge leading to the development of policy and theory of practice (Denscombe, 1998). Inductive logic creates space to generate new ideas with reasoning using a bottom-up approach to seek explanation (Hayes et al, 2010). The individual stories of pupils as well as the wider survey and compounded data can then be compared and contrasted in the development of such policy and theory of practice. This method aims to represent the voice of pupils in PE from a spectrum of perspectives and experiences to inform policy and theory of practice with regard to participation of PE in schools and also outside of school if appropriate.

### ***3.4.1 My Positionality and Bracketing***

It is important in research to take into account the positionality of the researcher (Charmaz, 2008) and clarify their insider/outsider knowledge and position. The influences that have shaped me in this field and thus given me preconceived ideas are mainly through an interest in sport and PE, my career as that of a secondary school teacher (Physics rather than PE), a lecturer in Teacher Education, my time as a coach in youth football and my own distant experiences of PE when I was a pupil at school.

My interest in PE and sport means that I see it as an important part of life. It is an entertainment and a passion and can stir emotions. This is focused around adult sport, in particular football, but including other sports such as cricket and rugby and tournaments such as the Olympic and Commonwealth games. I am in the main a spectator rather than a competitor although I do participate in running and occasionally 5-a-side football for leisure. Winning is not important when I participate as to me it is about taking part and is good for my health. There is also the social element to it as I participate with other people which gives motivation and a camaraderie. When watching professional sport there is a strong aspect of winning when involving a team that I support, although if I do not support either team then the drive is to see an exciting, entertaining and skilful game.

My career has encompassed being a secondary school teacher in Physics and subsequently a Teacher Education lecturer. My focus has been the development of the child/student in a safe environment where they are not scared of failure but feel part of the group and can take risks to enhance their learning. Giving children/students belief in themselves and aspiration has been central to my beliefs in the education of children/students.

I spent 5 years as an FA level 1 coach in youth football, coaching a team from Year 6 (10/11year olds) to Year 10 (14/15year olds). My beliefs set out above were central to the ethos I tried to engender in the team with equity at the heart of the philosophy, with all children playing the same amount of time. The world of youth football I found to be a vile place, all about winning rather than child development. This ethos was set by the adults involved whom seemed to view it the same way that they viewed adult professional sport. Going against the grain caused many problems in particular with some of the parents of the children as they saw it as about winning and felt the less able should not play as much as the more able, this obviously was more prevalent in the parents of the more able children.

In my own school days, although distant now, PE was a salvation. It was the lesson I looked forward to every week. I particularly liked team sports or athletics, although a good PE session could be spoiled by cross-country. That made it feel like a wasted lesson as it was hard, not enjoyable and not sociable. My PE lesson at secondary school was a journey from being one of the last picked at the beginning of secondary school to being asked to pick by the end and winning the School PE trophy and Best Performance on Sports Day trophy twice. It gave me a lot of self-esteem and although I could not have put it into words at the time it helped me in the male structure of hierarchy as sport is quite an important contributor.

Thus, I have had a range of experiences that have influenced me in this field and led to me undertaking this study. However, my experiences as a youth coach made me determined that the data derived from this study was going to be nothing to do with adults (including me) but was to be about children. Therefore, I needed to bracket off my experiences (see below) and just listen to what they were saying and hear their voice not my voice. That is why they drove the issues in the focus group and checked they had been represented correctly in the questionnaire survey prior to sending to the wider group, then of course their views and experiences came across again in more depth in the interviews. The key to bracketing my thoughts and experiences was the mantra that whatever they told me was right as it is about their thoughts, opinions and experiences, rather than mine or of theory in research papers. However, there are limitations to this method given this is my PhD thesis. I designed the process and created the environment that I felt would give them the security to express their voice. I involved adults (Head of PE in both schools) to make their preconceived decisions of ability as I wanted a broad range of children's voices. However, the conception of ability by PE teachers is relevant as that is the reality of the situation and children face the consequences of these judgements so that is crucial to their story. In the study, ability is only mentioned if the children refer to themselves as high or low ability. I also have the responsibility of representing their views as accurately as possible and to interpret them in the light of theory. Thus, there are limitations to bracketing my experiences and to the purity of pupil voice. However, I have attempted to achieve both of these counts to the maximum possible level.

In phenomenology some scholars will argue you can bracket your experiences and others will argue you cannot, depending on the approach (Chan et al, 2013). Bracketing is a mechanism validating data analysis and collection (Ahern, 1999; Chan et al, 2013). Interpretative phenomenology is more subjective with the researcher trying to interpret their understanding of the reflection of the experience already carried out by the individual (Bazeley, 2013), which is not in line with the premise of this study. In order to truthfully describe the experiences of the participants (in this case the pupils) it is necessary for the researcher to put aside his value set (Chan et al, 2013). Suppressing bias and preconceptions in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is to achieve transcendental subjectivity, this continuously assesses the impact of the researcher to ensure non-influence on the object of the study (Lopez and Willis, 2004). The researcher can bracket his/her subjectivity and prevent (or reduce) an impact upon the experiences and descriptions presented by the participants (Neubauer et al, 2019). To realise this, the researcher needs to stand apart, and not allow his/her subjectivity to inform the descriptions. This approach enables an objective researcher to interpret the experiences of participants into universal phenomenon (Davidsen, 2013). I feel I have achieved this objectivity by setting clear parameters in this study, although obviously my experiences cannot be totally erased.

Transcendental phenomenology, as an aspect of the methodological stance, brings the position of a tabula rasa to the study and the phenomenon emerge from the participants' experiences (Neubauer et al, 2019). However, there was a compromise in this study as in order to stimulate the focus group I needed some knowledge from literature in the field which would be influenced not only by adult authors but also by my experiences. This is the last point of influence of adult voice as the pupils' themes emerge from this, including a number of issues I had not thought about which reassured me about the bracketing of my experience and adult voice, and the concentration on pupil voice. I am also aware that my adult voice mediated their views in such instances as drawing the themes from their voices.

Bracketing is like setting aside theory, your own knowledge, interest and thoughts about the accuracy of participants in a bracket of a mathematical equation (Ashworth, 1996). The stance of this study is that whatever the pupils feel, is true, as it is about their experiences, so this aids the bracketing process. Their voice drove the research process and the findings are their findings and reflect their range of experiences and opinions.

### ***3.4.2 A qualitative approach with a quantitative element?***

Due to the paradigmatic position and nature of this study, about experiences, feelings and perspectives, a qualitative approach is deployed to gain insight into the social world of the pupils to allow their voice to be spoken and heard. The study does not claim to be mixed methods, however in order to discover a wider range of pupil voice and experiences, there is a quantitative element within the questionnaire survey.

Research into lesser-known topics can use an open approach in order to identify relevant issues or topics of interest in the field (Tritter, 2019). A qualitative method, such as focus groups for example in this study, can be used in the early stages of the research to ascertain the key issues or topics which then can be investigated in more depth in the later stages of the study using other methods (ibid). This was the basis for this study as pupil voice needed to drive the direction and key themes to make the research as authentic and representative as possible of pupil voice. However, to ascertain the views of a wider group of pupils and therefore to enhance and triangulate the pupil voice from the focus groups, a questionnaire survey was used (see section 3.5.3). This type of data collection method can be seen more in the realm of quantitative research. Although, it can be useful to use a mixed methods approach when analysing an issue in a research study, historically a mixed methods approach was not seen as feasible as the interpretivism of qualitative methods and the positivism of quantitative methods are a juxtaposition (Terrel, 2012; Norwich, 2020). However, many contemporaries would argue that integrating the two approaches gives a more comprehensive view and can embrace the strengths of both paradigms (Tashakkori, and Teddlie, 2010; Terrel, 2012). Although, a mixed methods approach does not necessarily need equal weighting of quantitative and qualitative and could have more of one method (Bryman, 2008), this study would not claim to be a fully mixed method. This study derives data using mainly qualitative methods although supported by quantitative methods and both inform each other. It adds to the richness of the data and the creation of knowledge, learning and understanding regarding the research question. However, it may not be regarded as a mixed method approach in the traditional manner, but it does use data collection from both methods to explain the phenomenon being explored. Rather it is a qualitative study that is supported at an appropriate data collection stage by quantitative data, which in this study could also be described as numeric qualitative data. The quantitative element aids the understanding of the phenomenon by ascertaining the experiences and opinions of the year group on the issues raised in the focus group, gauging the depth of feeling, allowing a voice from a wider range of pupils, revealing hidden voice, and giving the whole year group the opportunity to contribute to the direction of the research. Therefore, the quantitative element to this qualitative approach promotes and enhances the paradigmatic phenomenological position of the study and embraces the authentic pupil voice process.

### **3.5 Data Collection Methods**

Data collection Methods can be used in different ways. For example, quantitative and qualitative information can be collected together in a survey like in this study. Many method designs rely on data collected in the early stages influencing later stages (Tritter, 2019). The qualitative data from the focus group initiated a sequential data collection method leading to quantitative and qualitative data in the survey which in turn led to qualitative data in the interviews. Thus, qualitative and quantitative data led to the creation of each other and aided triangulation supporting validity and consistency of findings. Triangulation is the use of multiple methods in research to a better

understanding of a particular phenomenon (Tritter, 2019). The data gathered from different methods need to be analysed in an integrated manner (ibid). The resulting account of the phenomenon derived using different methods can then be given meaning using perspective from a particular theory (Silverman, 2015). This multiple data sources approach can lead to more valid findings (Pope et al, 2007; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010; Cresswell, 2015; Tritter, 2019). Therefore, there is a rationale, in order to get a wider range of voices, to use multiple data collection methods and some form of quantitative data in order to help give meaning and validity to the qualitative data.

The purpose of this study is to give a voice to the people who have the lived experience in PE and sport, namely the pupils. When pupil voice is used in schools or in academic study, it tends to involve consultation and feedback from children on an adult set problem. Tom Starkey (2018) writing in the TES warns about ‘student voice’ being a lever for management to make unpopular changes by cynically guiding the ‘voice of students’ which is then not their authentic voice but adult voice. I did not want to follow this path, thus the method of this study was to ascertain the experiences, thoughts, opinions and any subsequent issues faced by pupils directly from them as the key stakeholder. There is a need to understand the barriers that influence participation in PE (Fisette, 2013) thus we need to ask the right people i.e., the pupils, in the right way, in the right environment. It is acknowledged that questions can limit pupil voice (Brooker and MacDonald, 1999) but this study is attempting to liberate their voice, allowing children to express their feelings and quality assure the authenticity of their representations. Therefore, the whole process was driven by pupil voice while concurrently limiting adult voice (the researcher, literature and teachers) until absolutely necessary for their engagement. These appropriate moments included, the PE teacher as the gatekeeper whom I needed to engage to gain access, and the interpretation of pupil voice in the light of theory. Another limitation to this method is that with children, or even adults for that matter, it is not always possible for them (especially in the formal environment of the school with an external researcher) to just open up and start discussing their feelings, thoughts, experiences and opinions on PE and sport without any structure. Therefore, support questions drawn from the literature were used as a back up to support discussions in the focus group. This approach, although initially using the literature to facilitate the focus groups, did allow the pupils to dictate what is important to them in terms of PE and sport. This continued throughout the rest of the study with the questionnaire survey being based on these outcomes and checked by the pupils not only as a pilot for understanding but also to ensure it accurately reflected their thoughts, feelings, experiences and views that they expressed in the focus group. The interview questions then reflected directly the pupil voice from the focus group and questionnaire survey. This was another limitation as it was impossible for all participants in the questionnaire survey to check the interview questions to ensure they reflected the results of the survey. Therefore, I needed to do that task being as true as possible to the themes that emerged in the focus groups and the evolution of those in the questionnaire. The interviews did allow voice to flow as although once again scaffolded, it allowed and encouraged pupils to talk about what they felt, what they saw and give their interpretation of PE as well as add anything they wanted to share.

The main purpose of this study is to highlight pupil voice in PE and sport, and it does not seek to justify their views as that would be undue influence of adult voice. However, as this is a doctoral study their voice is interpreted and meaning given to it in the wider theoretical and conceptual framework by the researcher, which is adult voice. The phenomenon to emerge is at a thematic level that of pupil voice but at a conceptual level that mediated by adult voice. This is because the themes are drawn directly from the data provided by the pupils, however the interpretation of meaning is mediated through myself, as the researcher, using theory (from adult voice) to underpin explanation. However, as it is a phenomenological design all knowledge and meaning originates from their feelings and experiences as individuals and as they relate to social interaction.

The purpose of the project is to ascertain and hear pupil voice and thus it was critical that the themes for the survey were created from the pupils themselves. The project direction is entirely led by pupil voice. Therefore, data collection methods were needed to initiate themes based on said voice that then could be pursued in a manner to capture as wide a range of voice as possible across the participant cohort. The methods felt most appropriate to generate the initial data then go wider and finally deeper were deemed to be focus group then questionnaire survey then interview in a sequential manner each informing the next.

The data collection methods follow the sequence:

### **Focus Group-> Questionnaire Survey-> Interviews**

The data collection used a responsive approach starting with the findings from two, pupil focus groups of older age year groups in the state school (Year 10) and the independent school (Year 11). A sequential logic model was used (see Figure 1) which is participant-led, and the findings affected the subsequent phase of data collection. The outcomes of the focus group crafted the questionnaire survey, and both shaped the interviews of pupils. One of the main methods that a phenomenological approach uses to gather data is through recorded interviews (Denscombe, 1998) and this method was utilised in this study. It gives a richness to the themes and findings because it picks up on feelings and tone, and how pupils express their thoughts. This gives a greater insight into their world and

experiences, which a phenomenological approach aims to do.

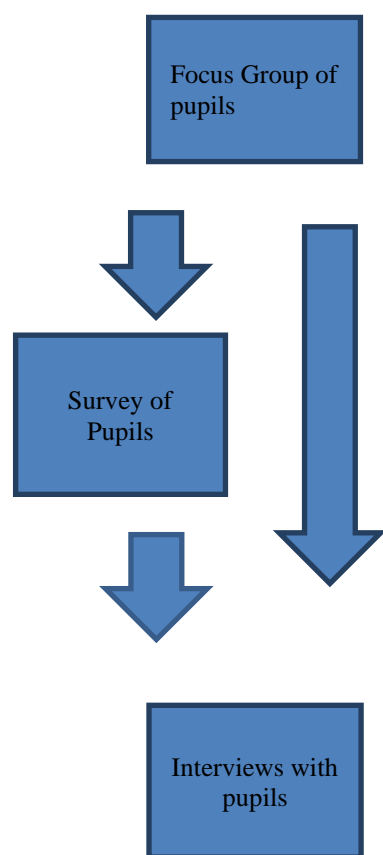


Figure 1: Sequential logic of data collection

Of the two participant schools, one was in the independent sector as this is a sector that has a sporting tradition but tends to be overlooked when researching using pupil voice and/or PE (Morton, 2021) and the other was in the state sector. The independent school is situated in an affluent area and the state school in a socially deprived area. This enabled me to access a broad range of pupil voice across society in their real-life setting. Although the focus of this study is children and their own experience, having schools from differing sectors and socioeconomic backgrounds enables the study to contrast any potential differences in perspective between pupils in the two sectors. Many independent schools operate on a gender basis and the one in this study is boys only, however boys tend to be underrepresented (as are independent schools) with regard to pupil voice in PE. The state school was mixed gender so both girls and boys were in the sample and involved in all the data collection methods. It did not matter that one school had both genders and the other had only one as this study is about the authentic voice of children, reflecting their real-life experiences. Gender mix or single gender school was their situational experience of school. In order to overcome access issues and to attempt to encounter typical cases, non-probability sampling and typical case sampling was used (Wellington, 2000). To get access to pupils and their voice I needed to go through adult



gatekeepers, namely headteachers and heads of PE. In order to get a broad range of experiences I asked for them to invite pupils across the ability range in PE to take part in the focus groups and subsequently high and low ability in the interviews. Selection of sample was entirely at the discretion of the PE teacher for the focus group, with a purposive sampling model deployed for the interviews (see sections 3.5.2/3.5.7). This obviously was in their adult opinion using their knowledge and expertise and ability construction. However, I only refer to children with such labels if they referred to themselves and were comfortable with these categories. The questionnaire survey was across the whole ability age range, although voluntary, so not every child completed it.

### ***3.5.1 Focus Group***

The study is about pupil voice therefore it is important that the construction of the study was built around and driven by pupil voice. Based upon this rationale it was crucial that the key themes originated from the pupils and the questions for the survey were drawn from the issues raised by the pupils. In order to determine the issues, two focus groups of Year 10/11 pupils were used as the method to derive the initial themes to focus upon in the questionnaire survey. I wanted older year groups in the school as they have more experience of PE and may be able to better reflect on their time. Thus, the base sample criterion was a pupil range of 14-16 year olds (see sampling section below) being involved in the study and this gave flexibility to the schools to let them decide which group they preferred to be involved as this is a crucial time for pupils with them embarking upon GCSE programmes. The independent school chose Year 11 (based upon having more pupils in the year group) and the state school chose Year 10 (due to exam commitments for Year 11). Thus, the beginning of the research process provided a stage for pupil voice.

Focus groups are not perfect (Longhurst, 2003) but do seem the appropriate generator for the themes in this study. I am aware that they can develop group norms and could also put pressure on members of the group out of step with the majority and encourage a concealment of view (Somekh and Lewin, 2005). Through the participant interaction the views of the pupils rather than the researcher can emerge and thus their agenda can predominate (Cohen et al, 2007), which is the aim of this study. In order to mitigate any discomfort, I created an informal environment by emphasising that there were no wrong answers as it was all about them and their feelings and experiences and whatever they said was right. I also tried to be inclusive in participation giving a platform for all voices. The pupils themselves were also quite responsive to each other and did not dispute someone else's experience or opinions. I attempted to take a back seat as the original question was very open ended. However, as predicted, stimulus questions were needed to get the discussion going in order to gain access to their thoughts and experiences (see Appendix 1). This approach is not inconsistent with focus groups as Somekh and Lewin (2005) found that the researcher does need to engage with the group and does need to generate the initial data for the group as well as collecting the data. Thus, literature was fleetingly analysed and reviewed to problematise the questions to stimulate

the discussion in the focus group. However, within these questions (and the initial open question) it was essential to ensure the flexibility in order to allow the pupils the opportunity to raise unexpected issues and information they felt relevant to the discussion. It is the interaction of the group and individuals that creates the data outcomes and yields insights which may not have emerged otherwise (Cohen et al, 2007). On this basis, the emerging themes, although partly stimulated by the literature and mediated by myself, were driven and formed by the pupils.

The rationale behind choosing a focus group to start the data collection is because they are useful for developing themes, orientating focus and empowering participants (Krueger, 1988; Morgan, 1988; Bailey, 1994; Robson, 2002; Cohen et al, 2007). Although the weakness of a focus group can be a contrived setting (Cohen et al, 2007), this was less of an issue in this instance as the children were all from the same year group in the same school and the group took place in the environment of a school classroom. It is an activity they will have undertaken before in different guises such as debate or group work in school and thus was familiar to them.

### ***3.5.2 Focus Group Sampling***

In designing the focus group, I felt that children from across the ability range would be the best platform to cover the spectrum and ensure that voice was represented from pupils of different PE profiles. I also did not want to cause any unnecessary friction or damage friendships so on this basis I requested that the Head of PE should choose the members of the group once they had given their consent to take part. I needed to give the Head of PE some criteria or they may have chosen all high ability for instance, so I felt the range of experiences would be best covered by requesting representation on a cross-ability basis. Although not an exact science I felt this would be the best method in this context to get a broad spectrum of thoughts, ideas and opinion. I am aware that this creates a gatekeeper with influence, but equally random choices could create a gatekeeper within the group.

When delivering the focus group, it is essential to encourage positive group dynamics, spontaneity, confidentiality but also adhering to the research agenda (Somekh and Lewin, 2005). A group from each school was chosen on this basis so views from both sectors had equal opportunity to emerge and consensus of outcome could be extrapolated. Morgan (1988, p.43), suggests 'between 4 and 12 participants in a group' but allow for more in case some do not turn up and Lewis (1992) suggests six or seven for children. On this basis six participants were chosen, as I felt this could represent the ability range but also be small enough to facilitate all participants having a voice. Although this method is purposive sampling and does not give a representative sample, the participants do co-produce the findings relevant to them at that time and place and it does veer towards consensus (Somekh and Lewin, 2005). Although both focus groups took place in different schools with different pupils and focussed upon the individual as well as the group, there was quite a degree of consensus on the issues they have experienced both positively and negatively in PE (see Chapter 4). This could have been due to the wide range of abilities represented by the children in both

groups although that is reliant on the knowledge, experience and definition of ability by adult voice (the Head of PE).

Focus groups lasting for about 25mins were held in both schools. All pupils contributed to the focus group although some were more vociferous than others. It was not necessarily the case that pupils deemed high ability had most to say. For example, in the independent school a child who self- identified as low ability had much to input about his feelings and the lack of opportunities for children in his perceived ability category.

### ***3.5.3 Questionnaire Survey***

The second phase of the project sought the opinions of the whole year group of children in the state school and the independent school to ascertain their perspectives on their experiences, feelings and the purpose of PE in school and sport outside of school if applicable to them. The questionnaire survey is a good method for collecting information from a wide range of people (Denscombe, 1998; Cohen et al, 2007). A survey gives a wider picture and aids representiveness (Wellington, 2000). Questionnaire surveys need to start with straightforward questions leading to open ended ones to ensure minimising difficulty, discomfort and confusion for the participant (Wellington, 2000).

Questionnaires help give the view of a wider population (Tymms, 2012) and this was intended to give breadth and widen voice to be inclusive of all the pupils in the year group (on a voluntary participation basis). The questionnaire survey included a range of question types and was divided into open ended and closed questions as advocated by Tymms (2012). The question types used were open ended questions to get thoughts feelings and opinions, Likert scale to get feelings about specific issues and multiple choice to ascertain range or occurrence (see Appendix 2). The Likert scale gives a number of possible responses and five types of responses are common (ibid), which is the number of responses used in this study (see Appendix 2 for response types). The length of the questionnaire was deemed to collect enough data as possible but not be too onerous for the respondent as questionnaires are important for response rate and validity (Tymms, 2012).

### ***3.5.4 Pilot Study and Representation Verification***

The conceptual level and second order themes extrapolated from the focus groups were used as a basis for the questions in the survey. All questions fitted into these themes, but it was essential that the pupils could scrutinise and then pilot the survey in order to promulgate their voice.

Thus, the questionnaire survey was scrutinised by the pupils from the focus groups in both schools to ascertain that it reflected the themes that they raised. The pupils who had participated in the focus groups were given the opportunity to scrutinise the questions to check and verify as it was critical that they felt their views from the focus groups were represented. This was a necessary step to ensure the limiting of adult voice and the predominance of pupil voice. The pupils indicated they could see how the questions reflected the areas they had raised, although I do appreciate that this was not an easy task for them to be asked to assess the questionnaire in this way. I was aware there could be an element of compliance, so I tried to put them at ease by saying that any thought they had was right as this was about their voice and interpretation of the focus group. Although they asked for clarification on some questions, they were unequivocal about feeling it was representative. The implementation stage was preceded by a pilot phase for the questionnaire. The pilot was undertaken by the pupils who took part in the focus groups at both schools. They also checked to ensure they understood the questions and completed the questions so I could check the reliability of the questions and that they were being interpreted in the ways they were intended. The pupils were more vocal in this task, teasing out the meaning of what the question was asking and ambiguities. Following these sessions some changes were made to the phraseology of the questions and the categories of the Likert scale questions. For example, they wanted to use ‘good’ ability rather than ‘high’ ability. It was crucial that the pupils had such scrutiny as with this being a pupil voice study, they needed to drive the themes in the process.

### ***3.5.5 Sampling for the Questionnaire Survey***

As previously mentioned, the optimum age range for participation in this study was 14–16-year-olds. These pupils are in Years 10 and 11 at secondary school. The rationale for this is that they have been at the school long enough to build up their experiences, perspectives and opinions regarding PE and wider sport and will be of an age where they are more able to reflect upon such. On this basis and within the age range parameters the state school chose Year 10 and the independent school Year 11.

It was my intention to use a questionnaire survey, using the online university survey tool BOS (Bristol online survey), in order to gather data from a wide range of children in the year group. However, although I proposed this online version (BOS) to both schools, the state school requested a survey using hard copies for logistical purposes. The independent school preferred to use the online survey from BOS. The main rationale for why the state school wanted a hard copy was the school had a cohort nearly four times the size of the independent school and for logistical reasons they felt a hard copy survey would be easier and less disruptive to deliver. This hard copy was created using a download from BOS but also needed directional instructions added following the answering of certain questions in order to guide the pupils as they would not be automatically directed as in the electronic version.

Although this was not the original intention, it did lead to having two different processes to deliver the same survey. This gave an insight from a methodological point of view of the need to respond to context as well as intricacies of survey delivery and the differing effects they may have upon the outcomes. The state school with the hard copy approach delivered the survey in their PSHE lesson. The pupils were asked to take part on a voluntary capacity giving their consent to complete it, which was stated on the first page of the survey. This method produced a higher completion rate but that could have been affected by situational coercion. The children could have felt more compelled to do it as they were in a formal class situation and many of their peers were completing it. However, a number of children (29%) still declined to take part despite these circumstances, which does indicate informed choice despite the situation. This approach may also have given a fuller picture of the range of opinions due to the high uptake. The independent school wanted the online survey as originally planned. The Director of Sport emailed the link to the whole year group with the same statement on the front page explaining it was voluntary and participation was dependent upon their consent. This approach required the pupils to complete the survey in their own time. This ensured less situational coercion but resulted in a lower percentage uptake. Therefore, it could be less representative as only self-motivated pupils may have completed it and it could have ruled out pupils who did not check their emails or simply forgot to do it. This mode was certainly voluntary, although of course children feeling a school responsibility may have done it on that basis. However, despite having lower numbers it may represent children who felt they had something to say.

Male and female pupils were identified separately in the state school in order to give a gender balanced view as PE in secondary schools tends to separate gender for participation. However, this did not apply in the independent school as it is a single sex boy's school.

The overarching intention of the questionnaire survey was in order to get a wide-ranging breadth of view from across the spectrum (inclusive of the full range of abilities) and to maximise pupil voice for all children involved in PE in both settings. The number of respondents in each school can be seen in Table 1.

School	Surveys returned (n/N)	Percentage Return
State	131/184	71%
Independent	23/54	43%

Table 1: Survey response rate

The response rates for both schools were quite high, in particular the state school, with the prospective reason for this discrepancy between schools highlighted previously. Burton et al (2008) state that a response rate of 30% is acceptable. Gillham (2000) feels that 30% as a minimum gives more certainty with validity. Both surveys were significantly above this 30% threshold enhancing the validity of the findings.

I do acknowledge the fact that the questionnaire survey data from the state school relates to a far larger number of pupils than from the independent school. The study is not a comparison of the two school, although this differential is something to bear in mind during the findings sections when occasional school differences arise. However, even then, this study is about children in their real situation and the reality is there are more pupils in the state school than in the independent school, the former being over three times the size of the latter. This size discrepancy only occurs in the questionnaire as the same number of pupils from each school participated in the focus groups and interviews. Most of the findings are about the collective group across both schools so it does not matter that one school was a larger sample size in the questionnaire than the other. Ultimately, this study is about pupil voice so how many or few children there are in either school is immaterial, as all children are important and whatever they think as an individual or a group should be listened to and heard.

### ***3.5.6 Interviews***

The themes emerging from the focus groups and the broader voice through the questionnaires guided further data collection in school that endeavoured to add depth to the study.

In order to get a depth of insight into the voice and perspective of young people I interviewed pupils in both schools. Based upon findings from the questionnaire survey and focus groups I chose pupils from the upper and lower quartiles of the ability range (as distinguished by PE teacher assessment and their ability construction) and to encompass potentially the widest range of views. Thus, I interviewed three high and three low ability pupils in both schools (mix of gender in the state school) totalling 12 young people.

The interview is a good method to gain in-depth information about a particular subject and is a well-used data collection tool in phenomenological approaches. Interviews are viewed as the best tool for this study as the data is based upon emotions, experience and feelings (Denscombe, 1998). Interviews can probe areas other methods cannot and are designed to elicit views and perspectives in areas that are unobservable (Wellington, 2000). This study needed the flexibility of an interview to collect data (Cohen et al, 2007) as the experiences of each participant are very individual. Ideally the interviews would have no structure to allow the flow of pupil voice. However, similar to the focus groups children need scaffolding and in order to look at the themes in depth, semi-structured interviews

were the chosen data collection method. Semi-structured interviews allowed for this individual approach which suits the nature of the topic (Robson, 2002). Although interviews are time-consuming it was felt that benefits of flexibility, non-verbal prompts and depth outweighed the disadvantages. It also must be noted that although the stimulus questions for the focus groups risked adult voice influence, the questions asked in the interview reflected themes that emerged from the pupil voice in the focus groups and the questionnaire survey. Hence, if there were any influence, this time it was pupil voice influence. It was also imperative to make children feel comfortable in the interviews, like in the focus groups, so having a structure for them with questions would probably make them far less likely to feel any discomfort in the proceedings.

In order to ensure pupil voice, the themes that emerged from the focus groups and subsequent questionnaire survey were the only focus of the questions asked in the interviews, with opportunities for pupils to expand upon such themes should they so wish or raise new issues or themes if relevant. Although it is impossible for the pupils to scrutinise all the surveys to ensure the interview questions fitted the pupil voice remit, my analysis checked that all the interview questions were related to issues raised in the questionnaire survey or the focus groups. Any new material raised by pupils in the interviews was followed up during the interview itself. The Interviews covered the topics that the participants needed to address (Mears, 2012) and in this case ensure the pupil voice continuity. Therefore, the main purpose of the interviews held with children were to add depth to the perspectives indicated by the questionnaires and focus groups. Questions in the interviews included reflecting on current and past experiences in PE for pupils and ascertaining their views on the purpose of PE, wider sporting activities and the development of children (see Appendix 3). Essentially the interviews developed individual stories and experiences of PE and sport but also related to the experiences of the wider group of children.

### ***3.5.7 Sampling for Interviews***

Sampling involved a range of children both male and female from across ability levels as judged using current criteria applied in schools. At this point of the research journey, there was justification for sampling on high and low ability level as there was mounting evidence of data from the previous two methods of a typified and differing experience from these two groups. Once again, the most expedient way to get this sample was to go through the adult voice gatekeeper (the Head of PE) and to use their criteria to what they deemed as ability. An alternative approach could have been asking for volunteers through the questionnaire, but this might have compromised the study. The questionnaire responses could not shape selection in order to ensure total anonymity which was crucial for two reasons. One being it would more likely lead to unfettered responses and give a more accurate picture of the true feelings of the pupils which is crucial for a pupil voice project. Secondly, this approach fitted with the ethical stance allowing, with parental opt-out, the schools and pupils to give consent to participation on grounds of the total

anonymity of the questionnaire survey. Given that the study gives a platform for the voice of pupils and as a result teachers' views were not sought, this sampling approach did mean the support of teachers with the project was crucial and required in order to engage with their pupils. Thus, this is another limitation and trade-off with regard to the purity of the study as pupil voice. For consistency, the same year groups (Year 10 in state and Year 11 in independent) in each school were selected for the interviews.

In order to recruit for the interviews, the pupils who had undertaken the survey were asked to volunteer for an interview on the basis that they had something they wanted to share about PE and sport, an opinion, a feeling, an experience, a story or simply to answer some questions on the subject. This criterion falls in line with the theme of pupil voice as the pupils were still driving the research process and taking part was entirely up to them. Due to school logistics, minimising disruption to the schools and time commitments of pupils out of lessons, it was not possible to interview all the pupils who volunteered. In order to get a range of experiences a purposive sampling method was deployed as pupil voice was, by this stage of the study, demonstrating that greatest variation of emotion and experience lay at either end of the ability spectrum. Therefore, each school was asked to present the volunteer pupils in terms of their ability in upper and lower quartiles and a random selection of 6 children in the upper ability quartile (3 per school) and 6 in the lower ability quartile (3 per school) as measured by each school's criteria was undertaken. The school provided their ability criteria for these judgements. Although not ideal, the school's measure of pupil ability in PE is the only credible way to include pupils from both ends of the ability spectrum. The rationale for using both ends of the spectrum of ability is that children in these two categories seem to have the most diverse experiences and strongest views when using the pupils' own assessment of ability as stated in the focus groups and questionnaire survey. Therefore, pupils were picked from the upper and lower quartile ensuring a balance of gender in the state school.

Thus, six pupils per school (three males and three females in the state school and all males in the independent school) were interviewed across the teacher constructed ability range. The pupils in the state school were a mix of male and female, as stated previously, as this study is about children in their real situation and the state school is mixed gender with segregated PE so both genders are required to be fully represented. The independent school was single gender (male) which is why their perspective was limited to a single gender undertaking PE in school. As previously mentioned, all pupils who volunteered could not be interviewed, a limit of six was set in each school as the interviews are designed to add depth not breadth to the study so a small number of participants is appropriate (Mears, 2012). It was also in keeping with causing as little disruption to both schools, avoiding creating logistical barriers for the participating schools and more importantly not affecting the curriculum and the education of the



pupils. Although teachers' perceptions and knowledge helped guide this selection of males/females and ability, confidentiality was maintained, and teachers were not present during the interviews.

### ***3.5.8 Interviewing Children***

When interviewing children in any format (such as interviews or focus groups) one needs to be cognisant that they do not have as much life experience as adults and may have differing linguistic skills and have different priorities (Cohen et al, 2007). It is imperative that children need to be made to feel at ease and confident, so interviews/focus groups are best to take place in their own environment and making them feel as relaxed (and informal) as possible. In group interviews children can feel more at ease and the interaction between participants can enhance response (ibid). Although group interviews with children are useful, individual interviews also have a value allowing discrete thought and depth (Eder and Fingerson, 2003; Cohen et al, 2007) and this study encompassed the advantages of both methods. The principles that I subscribed to during the interviews and focus groups were avoiding being seen in an authority role, getting to what children really think, involving quiet or nervous children, preventing friction destroying each other's views, preventing domination, and keeping the session interesting and on task (Simons, 1982; Lewis, 1992; Bailey, 1994; Breakwell, 2000 Cohen et al, 2007). I did this by drawing on my experience as a teacher, ensuring an informal relaxed environment, speaking in soft tones and simple language, thanking them for taking part and letting them know that the power lay with them in terms of taking part, withdrawing and the corresponding findings. For the focus groups the brief to the Head of PE was range of ability (in their opinion) and pupils that would not particularly cause friction with each other as I did not want the process to be unpleasant for any of the participants. Getting the right balance in chairing, group size and group dynamic is imperative when hosting a focus group for children (Cohen et al, 2007).

For the interviews, children were picked in conjunction with the Head of PE randomly from quartiles of adult ability construction, however they had indicated they would be happy to have an interview. The interviews were on a 1 to 1 basis so the potential for any detriment from a group dynamic had vanished. Once again, I deliberately put the children at ease using similar techniques to the focus group, as some pupils may have found this situation more intense than the group situation where there was peer support.

Some pupils can be less verbally confident, and it is crucial to give them an environment where they feel confident to talk about their experiences, feelings and opinions. It is paramount to minimise the barriers that get in the way of pupil voice such as the power differential and the inability to hear a story beyond preconception (Long and Careless, 2010) and ensuring the atmosphere of the research was relaxed, informal and engaging. The power differential was

tackled by explaining my distance (relationship-wise) from the school, not allowing teachers to be part of research and stressing that the pupils were in charge of their own destiny, all data was confidential and anonymous (and agreeing to this confidentiality in the focus group) and reiterating that they could withdraw at any time. Respecting the pupils and valuing their input was crucial not only in creating a supportive ambience in the research environment but also to the study itself. The research is from the stance that children are individuals in their own right and do not have a shortfall of competence (James et al, 1998).

Therefore, giving pupils the ownership and power in their participation and the research study are one and the same thing. In this study the pupils are the experts as it is about their experiences, opinions and feelings and they know themselves best. This was the key message to transmit to them in the interviews and focus groups which would hopefully put them at ease and make them more comfortable in their participation.

### **3.6 Validity, Trustworthiness and Triangulation**

Validity is from the positivist tradition of research and some researchers argue that it is not applicable in qualitative studies (Golafshani, 2003). The result of which has led to the development of qualitative concepts of validity, termed in more appropriate ways such as credibility or trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Golafshani, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined the trustworthiness of research as depending upon credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Creswell (1998) identified eight procedures for verifying qualitative research with the application of choosing two as well as the four aspects cited by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This model was applied to this study to assess its trustworthiness, as follows.

This study is about pupil voice so the best way to access their worldview is by asking them in an environment where they can speak. The method to enable this has already been addressed (section 3.4) and the authenticity is highlighted in Chapter 10, both combining to give a credibility and confidence in the findings. The findings from the research would be applicable in other contexts and the process would also be appropriate to other studies on voice. Therefore, there is a transferability with regard to the research. The findings were drawn from pupils in two very different schools who had never met each other, yet they were very consistent, and this supports the dependability of the study. As already covered in section 3.4.1, bracketing bias and ensuring that findings were shaped by the pupils was critical to this study, demonstrating the objectivity and confirmability of the research.

In Creswell's (1998) model two of his eight procedures need to be added to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, with the most appropriate for this study being clarification of researcher bias (reflexivity) and triangulation. As previously

mentioned, bracketing researcher bias (that being adult voice) was a critical part of the framework. A reflexive approach was deployed from inception of the study.

There is a triangulation of qualitative data gained from the sequential logic of the method and the participants (i.e., focus group, questionnaires, interviews of pupils) to propagate and express pupil voice as well as the literature in order to assess and interpret the purpose of school PE and of wider sporting activities if applicable, from the perspective of children. Triangulation is valuable in validation and three or more methods increase accuracy (Wellington, 2000). Data source triangulation aims to ascertain if phenomenon remains the same at other points (Stake, 1995) and this aided the foundation of pupil voice in this study. Other aspects of triangulation include the use of two schools and the consistency of the findings across them despite differing environments. The pupils themselves and their role in this study were also part of the triangulation as they were closer to the research than most research subjects would be.

Therefore, based on Creswell's (1998) concept of validity [incorporating Lincoln and Guba (1985)], the research does demonstrate trustworthiness.

### **3.7 Ethics**

In order to carry out this research, ethical approval was sought and obtained from Northumbria University ethics committee. The process involved the submission of an application setting out in detail various aspects of the planned project including the methodology employed, the proposed data collection methods, ethical considerations and participant information and consent forms. Two anonymous reviewers then scrutinised the application and approved the submission.

#### ***3.7.1 Informed Consent***

At every stage at this process informed consent was a pre-requisite of participation in this study. This is central to the ethics of social research (Homan, 2001) and particularly important when dealing with young people.

Anonymity in the written thesis, questionnaire survey, and interviews, and group confidentiality in the focus groups were established. Informed consent for participation was sought from participating schools, the parents and most importantly the children involved. It was made clear to all participants that they were free to withdraw at any point. It is paramount that informed consent was given, and participation was only on the basis of particular choice and for no other reason. As previously mentioned, it was essential that the environment and interactions ensured the pupils were at ease as this facilitates them not feeling any coercion to be involved.

All data was stored securely with only myself having access (password protected on University U-drive/one-drive and hard copies in key locked cupboard).

All participants and the two schools were given a summary of the findings at the conclusion of the study.

Headteachers of the schools were approached initially to seek consent to involve their staff and pupils in the study. Following approval at this level, teachers (whose classes are involved) were approached and talked through the project giving them supporting written documentation. They were made aware of the right to opt in and then opt out should they wish to do so at any point without consequence.

Written documentation explaining the purpose of the project and the role of the children was sent to parents and the distinction between this project and school activity was made very clear (see Appendices 4-9). They were also aware of their right and their child's right to opt in and then opt out should they wish to do so at any point without consequence. Children under 16 are not deemed to be legally competent to make informed consent and so parents are required to do so on their behalf (Wiles et al, 2005; Jones and Stanley, 2008). Tymchuk (1992, p.128) distinguishes between consent and assent with 'children only participating with parental consent and parents only allowing consent with approval from pupils.' This study works on this ethical principle, however, it takes the stance that although children under 16 cannot give legal informed consent, certainly children in the 14-16 age range are capable of giving informed consent. Therefore, ethics throughout this study has a triple lock of parental informed consent, pupil informed consent and school informed consent. Although legally the most important informed consent is that of the parents and school, for this study the most important informed consent is that of the pupils, so if they do not want to be involved then they will not be involved, it does not matter if the school or parents have given consent. Due to legal informed consent, it cannot work the other way i.e., if children want to be involved but parents and the school do not want them to be involved then unfortunately, they cannot participate.

Following the selection of participation, the children were briefed about the study just prior to data collection. They had already received information about the project and given consent. This briefing set out in an age-appropriate manner what the research was about and their potential role within it and also outlined the fact that they could opt out at no detriment at any time and reassured them that there were no wrong answers, it was just about their thoughts, feelings and opinions. They were also given age-appropriate written documentation (see appendices 4-9). It was carefully and comprehensively explained that they do not have to take part in the research and that it will not be detrimental to them in any way not to take part or to withdraw participation at any point. It is essential that the children

are made to feel comfortable with the process, given autonomy to make their own decisions about the study and their involvement and that they are given this knowledge at an appropriate level.

The focus groups involved children in a peer setting. Although, everything attributed to children in the written study was anonymised, in the actual focus group setting this was impossible as the pupils knew each other. Hence, the group agreed to treat everything that was said and by whom with confidentiality. This gave pupils a reassurance to be able to say what they felt. The groups were held in a very relaxed and courteous manner without disagreements with everyone respecting the differing views and experiences of each other.

The interviews took place following consent by the pupils and their parents and DBS clearance by the school. Pupils were interviewed on a one-to-one basis and were asked to give consent to a recording being aware their thoughts were confidential, and they would be anonymous in the written thesis and the recordings would be destroyed after the project. The pupils were interviewed on a one-to-one basis without the presence of teachers to enable them to feel more confident to express exactly how they felt rather than what they thought their teachers would want them to say. They were also put at ease at the beginning of the interview by explaining to them that there were no right or wrong answers and that whatever they felt like sharing was fine and if they did not want to share that was also fine. Gentle tones were also used to reassure the pupils that this was not a pressure situation and their views to help this project would be much appreciated.

Informed consent for the questionnaire survey was undertaken slightly differently due to the complexities of survey consent. For a large questionnaire survey of this nature where total anonymity is guaranteed consent may be obtained from the school rather than the parent (Sieber, 1992; Lindsay, 2000; BERA, 2004; Jones and Stanley, 2008). Informed consent was requested from the pupils who volunteered to take part, prior to commencing the questionnaire, and a letter was sent to all parents informing them of the activity (see Appendix 9). The letter also informed parents that their pupils would be asked for informed consent, alerted them that the school had agreed to the survey and given consent for pupil participation and allowed parents to withdraw their child should they wish to do so. This process for informed consent is in line with Northumbria University ethical guidelines. This approach giving total anonymity may also have helped reassure pupils that they could state their true views and feelings and not feel any obligation to sanitise responses.

### ***3.7.2 Potential Emergent Ethical and Emotional Issues***

I was cognisant of the potential for ethical or emotional issues to arise through the conduct of this research. It was of paramount importance not to affect the emotional well-being of any of the pupils participating in the study. Therefore, I took measures to mitigate this risk and developed contingencies should such a situation arise.

In both focus groups and the interviews, I attempted to make the pupils feel as relaxed and valued as possible by using soft tones, putting them at ease, ensuring they knew whatever they said was 'right' and thanking them for their time and involvement. I was aware that in the focus groups pupils were with peers and may feel dominated or disrespected or unable to share their thoughts or opinions. Therefore, I took the precaution of asking teachers to select pupils who were less likely to feel any tension between each other. We also agreed 'ground rules' of respecting other participant's views, confidentiality inside the group, and anonymity outside of the group. I was also aware of where the PE teacher was located and should any participant appear to be in distress, I would have made an excuse to end the session instantly and seek help immediately for that participant from their teacher. In reality this did not occur, and all pupils were supportive and respectful of each other's views, even when they were very different. I attempted to minimise the powerful differential between the pupils and myself by distancing myself from the school and introducing myself using my first name. Teachers were not present during the focus groups or interviews, and we all sat round a table with me at the side in amongst the children rather than at the head of the table, to also diminish any power status. While pupils were speaking, I sat back to encourage them to lead the discussion and I nodded in a positive manner to reassure them.

I deployed a similar approach with regard to manner, tone, re-assurance and power differential in the interviews. Although, on this occasion there were no peer group issues to consider, I was aware that being in a peer group also brought peer support which was not present during the interviews, which were potentially more intense for pupils. I was also aware that we may talk about emotional experiences they have had in PE at a greater depth than in the focus group or questionnaire, which potentially could cause distress. Once again if this became apparent, I would have made an excuse to end the interview and would have sought the help of the PE teacher to support the pupil. However, the reality of the situation was very different, as pupils seemed very enthusiastic to tell their stories and if anything, it appeared to be quite a cathartic process as they probably have not had the opportunity to share their stories and experiences before.

### **3.8 Recruitment Strategy for Schools**

Schools were identified based upon criterion of both being in the North East of England, one being an independent study and one being in a socially deprived area. The North East was also chosen for ease of access and my understanding of the local context. Headteachers at such schools based upon this broad selection criteria were approached about the study. I did this on an iterative basis only approaching one school in each category at a time. An independent school initially agreed to participation but then failed to communicate and respond to requests despite repeated reassurances that they would take part. Eventually, I moved onto another independent school who kept saying

they would ring back but never did. Finally, a third independent school readily engaged, and they became part of the study.

Similarly, the first state school I approached agreed to take part, but responses became sporadic. This was addressed with a meeting but once again communication and response dissipated. I then approached another state school who responded enthusiastically, and they became part of the study. This process used up a lot of time in the study, as I felt I could only approach one school in each category at one time and needed to be polite in my pursuit giving them ample time to respond in order not to be seen as pressurising them. The schools that said, 'yes', but did not then communicate gave me the biggest dilemma as I believed they were part of the study so did not want them to feel rejected by moving onto another school. Timewise, this cost about 9 months with one school and eventually I had to curtail and search for another school. In hindsight, I would not spend as long with a school that only sporadically responded but I am grateful to schools for participation so felt I needed to be patient with them.

### **3.9 Data anonymisation**

All data was anonymised. Participants were allocated a code, for example, Child H etc., for focus groups and pseudonyms for the interviews (see Appendix 11). This different labelling was so it could be easily identified if comments were from the focus group or interviews. The quotes from pupils in the questionnaire survey were given no labelling as it did not add any value to pupil voice to do so in this instance as there were so many voices present, so it was more about the voice of the collective group. No one, bar the researcher, had access to the data. Both schools and any organisations mentioned were also anonymised.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

Analysis of data is key to developing meaningful findings. Reflecting the interpretive paradigm of this study and phenomenological methodology the data analysis utilises an inductive approach. Such an approach generates knowledge from data and helps to avoid pre-empting findings (Silverman, 2013). A Phenomenological approach attempts to identify phenomena via the experience of individual people (Bazeley, 2013). The phenomena derived as themes are structures of experience (van Manen, 1997) and said theme identifies meaning and content (Bazeley, 2013). In order to best represent such experiences as themes this study adopted a thematic data analysis method across the 3 data collection methods. The questionnaire survey also included quantitative methods of analysis using SPSS which supported the themes derived from the qualitative aspects of the survey and also those from the prior focus groups. The method used for thematic analysis was that of Braun and Clarke (2006). This method extrapolates first order themes which are then grouped into second order themes which were subsequently convened into

conceptual themes (see Figure 2). Coding and categories in the form of first then second order themes were applied to focus groups, questionnaires and interview transcripts to enable a thematic analysis of the data. The produced conceptual level themes evolve from this coding (first order) followed by categories (second order) and reflection of analysis (Saldana, 2014). This suits the methodological approach as well as being a pertinent method to highlighting emerging patterns within the data. Coding and subsequent categories were derived from the data in a posteriori form, being drawn from the experiences of the pupils. The coding however does not draw on a scientific logic, in line with the approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), it is more of a basic theme that can be grouped into a category and finally an overarching theme which contributes to the overall concept of the study.

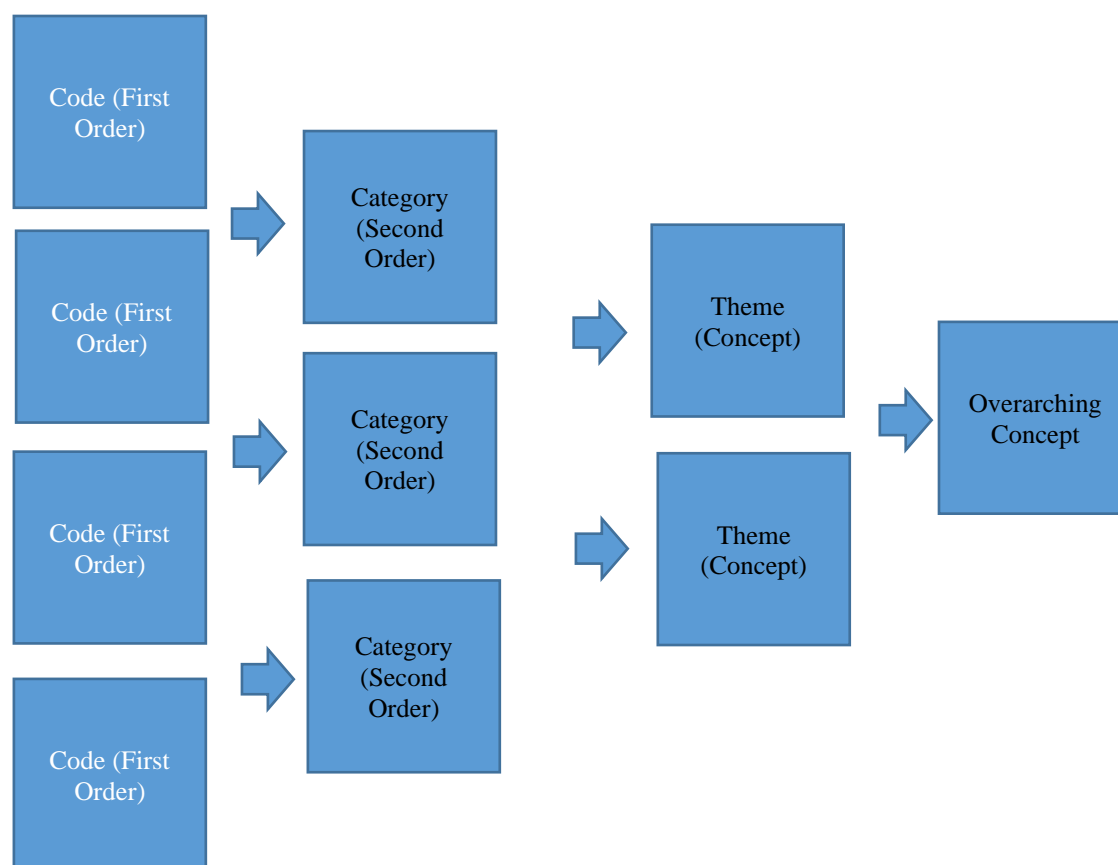


Figure 2: Thematic Analysis Model for Study

The themes were initially drawn from the focus group to ensure the direction of the research was driven by pupil voice, these were reinforced with aspects altered to some degree by the questionnaire survey. Applying sequential logic, the interviews were designed around the emergent themes so although there was opportunity for new themes to emerge, the interviews in the main provided the depth to the study with stories of the pupils relating to PE and sport and these illuminated the emerging themes within an individual's experience.



Due to the sequential and progressive nature of the data collection system, with one method then informing the next, the application of thematic analysis was influenced by the previous incarnation. The initial data analysis from the focus groups was *tabula rasa*. Both schools were initially analysed independently to ascertain any differences between the schools. First order themes were transcribed from both focus groups and these were then grouped into second order themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The second order themes were very similar between the schools so conceptual level themes were applied across both data sets. This was pertinent as although they are in different settings the conceptual themes spanned across both schools. This could be due to the philosophical stance that this is about children in their real setting rather than the differences in their contexts, although these do appear, however the similarities of children's experience are more common than contextual difference. The questionnaire survey was initially analysed using SPSS which gave individual quantitative data and also allowed for cross tabulation. IBM SPSS is a well renowned software package for analysing quantitative data (Connolly, 2007). SPSS also listed the qualitative data surrounding different questions. This qualitative data was then subject to thematic analysis although no longer in a *tabula rasa* format. First order coding was applied but themes from the focus groups were used as categories and codes were placed in these categories. This process did allow for other themes to emerge or refine existing themes. The quantitative data were utilised to support the themes and create a perspective on breadth. Although there was some correlation between quantitative data this was not a relevant analytical method for a phenomenological approach with such data being used to ascertain the breadth of feeling and experiences. The result of this second application of thematic analysis to the study was to refine and slightly broaden the themes. This analysis did also highlight additional sub-themes within the themes which would not have necessarily emerged without this data collection method i.e., issues around weight. These developed themes were those used in the study and were applied to the interviews (see Figure 3). Thus, the interview schedules were informed by the analysis of the first two data collection methods and therefore, the thematic analysis applied once again already featured existing categories. It was done in a manner to allow for any new category to emerge if applicable, but the main purpose of this data collection method was to add depth to the study and feature individual experiences to help give meaning to the emergent phenomena. The demonstration and application of this thematic analysis and how the themes emerged can be found in Chapter 4.

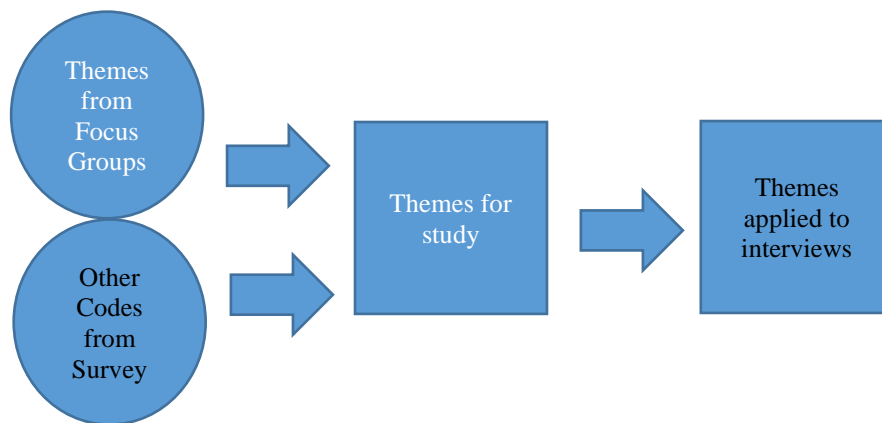


Figure 3: Thematic study model demonstrating the link between focus group, questionnaire survey and interviews

The theoretical framework for data analysis has been grounded within a phenomenological framework as this is the stance of the study on knowledge and meaning. The study also required a theoretical framework to support the interpretation of pupil voice. Any such interpretation does risk stepping away from pupil voice and I was cognisant of this limitation. It was also important to acknowledge that PE is a taught subject in UK schools, thus, any effect on PE needs to be conceptualised in this manner. In order not to pre-empt any findings and to be resolute with pupil voice driving the direction of the study, no theoretical framework was anticipated in advance of the study in which to interpret the findings. This allowed the findings and hence pupil voice to dictate the interpretative framework rather than trying to fit the findings into a preconceived framework. Given the findings that emerged were in five interlinked themes (see Chapters 5-9) with all seeming to rest upon social interaction, judgement and construction this appeared to suggest social field theory (Bourdieu, 1992) as an interpretative framework (see Chapter 2). Such a theoretical framework is not unusual in the area of PE and has been applied by key researchers in the field such as Evans (2004). This application in research by John Evans and others also fits the context of the dynamic of the class. Bourdieu (1992, p.72-73) defines the field as, ‘a configuration of relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon the occupants, agents or institutions’, with the field in this instance being the PE class in the school setting. He focuses upon the fact that people learn the social or symbolic capital of the field including culture, beliefs, practice, language and unwritten rules. Such social or symbolic capital can help participants succeed in the field (Bourdieu, 1992). The findings from pupil voice indicated this to be a suitable theoretical framework in which to interpret their voice in conjunction with relevant literature to interpret the findings. This step however creates a departure from pupil voice to adult voice which the study has been attempting to prevent throughout the process. This is a limitation of the pupil voice process but is mitigated by the fact that their voice led the search for the theoretical framework rather than this being decided in advance and their findings being levered into that framework regardless of their voice.

### 3.11 Summary

This chapter has outlined the research methodology and decision-making rationale behind said process. It has demonstrated how the driving force of pupil voice underpinned all aspects of the methodology including stance, view of knowledge and meaning, method, data collection and data analysis. The summary of the overarching research methodology is displayed in Figure 4. Five themes emerged from the data as a result of this methodological process, which are examined in depth in the following findings and discussion chapters.

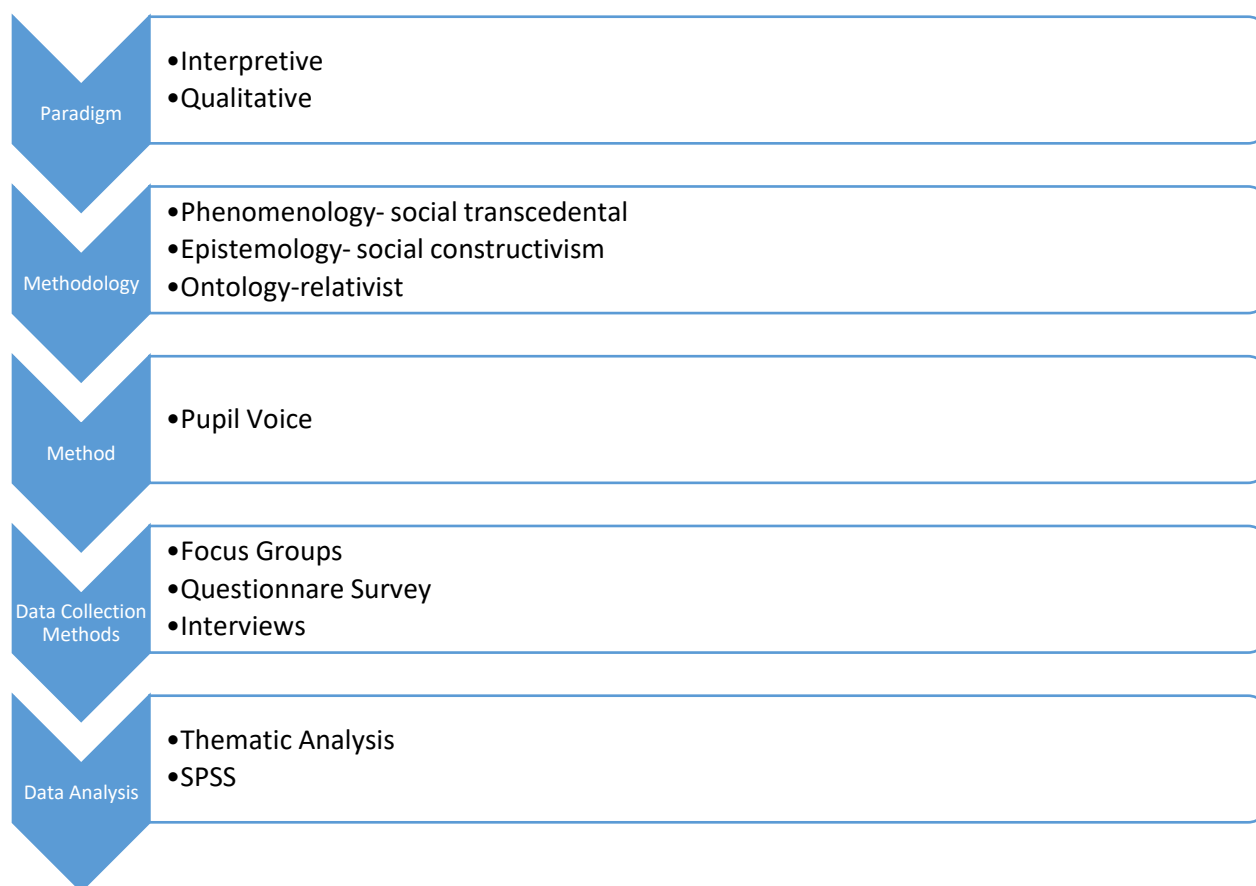


Figure 4: Summary of Research Methodology

## Chapter 4. Findings: Focus Groups

‘You kind of get left out’ (Child M, IS)

### 4.1 Introduction: Premise for the Findings and Discussion Chapters

Chapters 4-10 identify the key themes to emerge from the data and the discussion will relate these findings to existing knowledge in the field. The discussion will also demonstrate the relevance of this study and how it adds to knowledge. These chapters give a holistic understanding of the study field and interpret the meaning of the extrapolated data. In order to make sense of the large amounts of data which are mainly qualitative, with some supportive quantitative data, these chapters seek to present such data in an accessible manner moving from the pupil outcomes to conceptual theories to recommendations for practice. However, the conceptual theories and practice recommendations are derived from listening to pupil voice rather than fitting such voice to preconceived ideas (see Chapters 10 and 11).

In order to comprehend the driving force of pupil voice as the method of this study which guided the whole process, the focus group findings are presented first, as this is where the initial themes of the investigation emerged, followed by analysis of the questionnaire survey which gave breadth and the interviews which provided depth. To prevent repetitiveness and to enable depth and breadth to be accessed simultaneously, the interviews and questionnaire survey findings are presented together (see Chapters 5-9).

All verbal or written quotes by the pupils are presented in italics. Direct quotes from what pupils said in either the focus group or interview are referenced to that particular child. In order to distinguish between the focus group children and interview children, those involved in the former are labelled Child H, Child O etc. and those involved in the latter are given pseudonyms such as Elaine, Gary etc. Unreferenced quotes are comments from the questionnaire survey, and they are used to clarify the reasons behind the answers pupils gave to these questions. Adding such a reference, i.e., child 1 to 154, to the questionnaire survey would not add to the narrative or findings and just inhibit the use of such comments to support the responses of this wider group of pupils. Given that labelling would not allow purposeful tracking due to the large number of participants in the questionnaire survey, as opposed to the focus groups and interviews, and with the premise what really matters is that these are the reasoning of children, no reference is attached to these quotes. For the focus group and interview, individual pupils provided a greater depth of understanding and illumination for the study. Therefore, it was deemed relevant to add a pupil reference for each quote including school (SS-State School, IS-Independent School), in order to understand the perspective of each pupil, track their story and to allow the range of voice and fullness of argument to be heard.

The study is about pupil voice, wherever their real situation is, whatever circumstances they face and the environment which they inhabit. Thus, it is not always applicable to analyse the pupil experience using gender or school type. However, on occasions where this is appropriate as it adds to their story, the findings or analysis will reflect using the lens of gender or school type.

The findings are presented as themes demonstrating their evolution through the focus group and validation and refinement through the questionnaire survey. The interview also validated and could potentially redefine themes but in practice the broadness of the themes accounted for the narrative. Following this, a conceptual analysis and interpretation was undertaken using relevant theory. This is obviously an entry point for adult voice but as explained in Chapter 2, the pupil voice emerging through the findings drove the applicable theoretical framework and subsequent literature review.

## **4.2 Focus Groups**

The focus groups were held in the state school and the independent school. Six pupils from each school took part. Each focus group was analysed separately. The transcripts were read a number of times and pupil thoughts were identified as first order constructs. These first order constructs were then interpreted into second order constructs. These second order constructs were then grouped into themes. Finally, the themes were developed into conceptual themes that acted as a conduit for the voice of the pupils and contributed to an overarching concept.

The data presented below (Tables 2 and 3) corresponds to the second order constructs from each school and the subsequent themes and conceptual themes. They demonstrate the pathway from the findings in the focus groups to the conceptual themes, which subsequently combine into an overarching concept (see Chapter 10). My method of thematic analysis was based on Braun and Clarke (2006) (see Chapter 3), and I applied each iteration of analysis resulting in first construct (code), second construct (categories) and third construct (themes). However, at this point I felt there was one more level of refinement. The theme of pressure and support was encapsulated by ‘pressure’, as support could mediate pressure. Similarly, the theme of freedom and choice was reduced to ‘choice’ as pupils seemed to indicate that choice gave freedom in this context. The theme of importance, enjoyment and attraction were all related to participation, so they became part of the ‘participation’ theme. Tables 2 and 3, demonstrate the pathway to the themes and in the case of ‘participation’ there was a dual pathway leading to the same theme (which was aggregated and analysed as one, rather than have two participation themes). Due to the fact the data had now undergone a further iteration of thematic analysis, I entitled these final themes as ‘conceptual themes’, to differentiate between the final two iterations, and also for the fact they fused into the overarching concept (see Chapter 10). However, for ease of understanding and clarity of expression, when I present the findings (Chapters 4-9), I just refer to the ‘Conceptual Themes’ as ‘Themes’.

#### 4.2.1 Independent School

Second Order Construct	Theme	Conceptual Theme
Traditional Limited Opportunities Winning Funding Self Determination Motivation	Participation	Participation
Environment Resources Cognition Individual skills Team skills Ability Career	Development and Ability	Development and Ability
Mental Health Physical Health	Health	Health
Intrinsic Pressure Extrinsic Pressure Criticism Support	Pressure and support	Pressure
Usefulness Role Models Inspiring Innovation Image Enjoyment Awareness	Importance, Enjoyment and attraction	Participation
Variety of Sports Coercion Facilities and range Choice for less able	Freedom and Choice	Choice

Table 2: Focus Group Thematic Analysis for Independent School

#### 4.2.2 State School

Second Order Construct	Theme	Conceptual Theme
Range Challenge Resilience Motivation Winning	Participation	Participation
Choice Variety Gender and Choice Process	Freedom and Choice	Choice
Cognition Skill Communication Physique Ability experience	Development and Ability	Development and Ability
Mental health Physical Health	Health	Health
Internal Pressure External pressure Mistakes Criticism support	Pressure and Support	Pressure
Importance Enjoyment Inclusion Pupil voice	Importance and Enjoyment	Participation

Table 3: Focus group thematic analysis for State School

#### 4.2.3 Theme 1: Choice

##### *Choice (Independent School)*

The theme of ‘Choice’ with regard to which sports they play and how they undertake them was identified as a key theme to emerge in both focus groups. In the independent school, choice was raised although it was seen from differing perspectives. Child G described that, ‘*We do football, rugby, cricket, badminton, table tennis*’ which although suggests five different sports this is not a particularly comprehensive list. Child M who identified himself as less able in PE said:

[there was] *'Not a lot of range. Sporty kids get to choose what they do. Like now there is either football or table tennis and the sporty kids can choose. For me and [Child F] we are forced to do table tennis, which is not necessarily what we want. There is a lot of range for sporty kids but for anyone who is not sporty, you kind of get left out.'*

There seems a divide between the pupils in the school with regard to choice, which does seem to be ability-based. For example, Child O, who identified as higher ability, talked about being happy with the choice of sports and stating, *'it is seasonal, we do rugby and football in the winter and cricket in the summer. It's the end of the year and we are doing football because more people like football'*. The final part of the sentence does suggest some element of choice as he talks about now doing football because more people like it, which could mean that they do get choice at times and the PE teacher goes with the consensus. However, Child O did add that, *'we need more space and facilities to be able to do a wider range of sports and more coaches'*. Consequently, this alludes to the fact that he may not be satisfied with the variety of sports on offer at the school.

Child L seemed quite happy with PE and when asked what he would like to do in PE retorted, *'pretty much what we are doing. I like games they are enjoyable and free'*. The two children identifying as lesser ability both felt strongly that they did not get a choice in PE, but they would like a choice, Child M stating, *'I think we should be allowed to do football instead of being forced to do table tennis'* and Child F adding, *'I would like a wider range, so you don't get forced to do something you don't want to do. I would like to choose a sport or an activity'*. These responses from F and M suggests the feeling of coercion with regard to PE participation which would wane if offered a choice of activity. Thus, there is an implication of not only they did not have a choice, but also a suggestion of an element of compulsion with regard to the activity in which they participated.

### *Choice (State School)*

In the state school pupils spoke of the variety and amount of PE they undertake. Child S said they:

[do], *'2 hours per week, every term we do something different each lesson'*. Child A added that, *'We focus on topics like two sports each term. Like the girls are doing athletics and rounders and the boys will do something different. We do sports like cricket, rugby, swimming, football.'*

This alludes to some degree of variety but also a difference between genders. This variety was also highlighted by Child C who said, *'most lessons are different as we learn about different sports or move on to different subjects'*. However, one pupil did allude to repetition of sports as Child A mentioned, *'Sometimes we repeat sports that we have already done in the year and don't move on to do other sports like rugby and that, we keep repeating'*. It also seemed important with regard to how PE was delivered as when talking about what she liked Child S said, *'We are*



*set in different classes on our ability so we can develop skills*'. It is interesting that Child S established a link between skill development and ability setting.

When the group talked about if they could choose the sports they would undertake, most of them, in unison as a group, listed traditional PE sports such as, *'football, netball, swimming, rugby, table tennis'* and *'tennis'* was added by Child C. Two of the girls highlighted that they liked gymnastics, Child S stating, *'if we do gymnastics it's quite good'* and Child A agreeing, *'yeah gymnastics is quite good'*. Dance was also requested by one of the female pupils, Child E saying, *'Dance, because it is different to every other sport. You can do it individually or you can do it as a group'*. This demonstrates an insight into different ways PE could be undertaken, in this case potentially individual, which differs from many traditional sports. Child S also advocated for the inclusion of dance and also trampolining, *'it's like dance it is different and gets forgotten about, I like trampolining as well'*. Although, pupils did seem to undertake a range of sports there appeared a desire to have a choice of more activities and some less traditional ones such as dance.

### *Summary*

Pupils in both schools raised the issue of 'Choice' mainly from the perspective of having the opportunity to undertake a wider range of sports, including non-traditional sports such as dance or trampolining. However, some of the pupils identifying as less able felt choice was restricted for them compared with higher ability pupils and thus, they were faced with a barrier prohibiting participation in some sports. One pupil, Child S, in the state school did mention her preferred method of delivery based upon ability setting and Child E raised awareness of individual PE, these are other dimensions of choice, being that of process of learning and participation rather than variety of curriculum. There were also indications of different choices for girls and boys and some pupils feeling coerced to participate.

The second order constructs during analysis included variety of sports available to them, lack of choice amongst less able, a degree of coercion, facilities for sports, what they would like to undertake in PE, gender and choice and process of PE i.e., individual or team, ability setting etc. Further thematic analysis categorised this under the umbrella conceptual theme of Choice (see Figure 5).

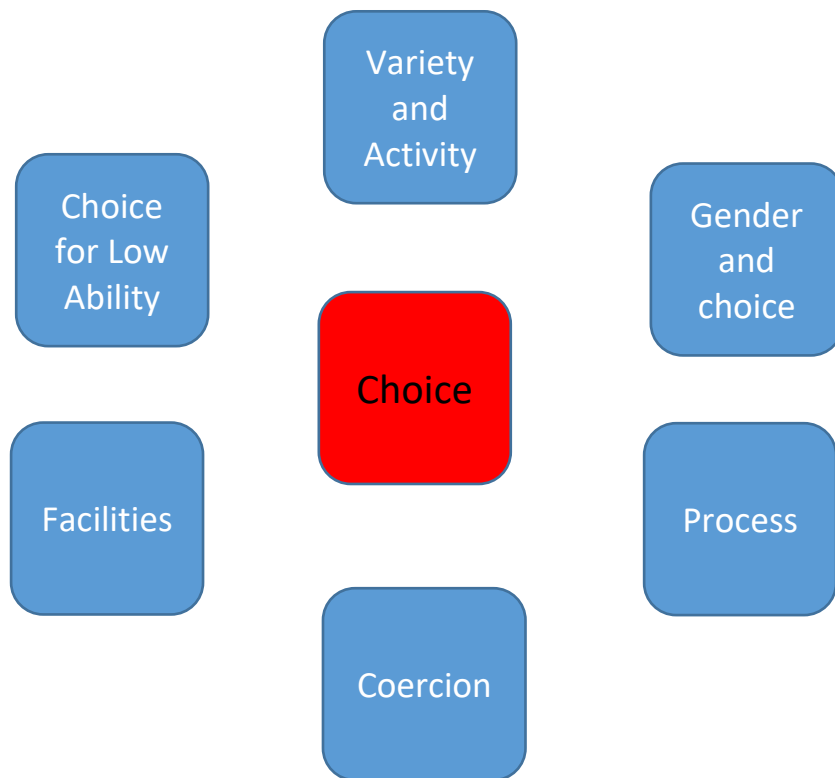


Figure 5: Second order constructs which provided conceptual theme of choice

#### **4.2.4 Theme 2: Participation**

##### *Participation (Independent School)*

The children talked about participation in PE at their school and in sport outside of school. They raised the issue that their school was quite traditional regarding the sports they played. Rugby was seen as the main sport and they remarked about links with outside professional clubs. These links led to opportunities for them outside of school which they felt they would not get if it was not for their school. Child H talked about participation in school in a positive manner saying, *'I like drills and rugby and games because it helps us to improve as a team. For example, (in) rugby we play forwards and backs and they are areas that help us to develop'*. Others concurred about enjoying participation with Child L mentioning he, *'liked the games because you can express yourself freely'* and Child O saying, *'I like safe environment because you can do cool stuff'*. This was an insight into the perception of different sporting environments as Child O played sport inside and outside of school but felt school was a safe environment as opposed to performing outside of school.

Some of the children spoke about participation in sport outside of school. Child L said, *'I play cricket and rugby. I enjoy it and I would rather play cricket and rugby than sit in the house'*. Child H stated that, *'I don't play for a club but I enjoy a kick about with the rugby ball, as it gets you out of the house and it is good for health benefits'*.

Participation in sport outside of school was not totally the preserve of the more able as Child M added that, *'Occasionally I play badminton with my next-door neighbour. I do it for fun'*. It does seem apparent that enjoyment is a key component of participation outside of school as these three pupils mentioned that, with one adding about health benefits. If you are not interested in sport then that can be a barrier to participation with Child F stating that, *'I don't participate in sport outside school as I'm not really interested in it'*.

The pupils did see the lack of opportunity and funding as being issues with sport outside of school. This was twofold with not having funding to provide opportunities in the community as well as the fact that membership fees of clubs and equipment could make sport inaccessible for some people. Child L advocated that *'[there] needs to be more opportunity outside school so people can play a range of sports. If it was available and better funded people would go along, participate and enjoy it more'*. Child G added, *'there is opportunity to play cricket, rugby and football but after that there is not much as there is no funding there'*.

A number of the group raised the issue of limited resources within the school and explained that they had a non-3G artificial pitch which was quite small and not satisfactory for team sports. They also had a gym on site but felt that was limited in size. However, the school did have some fields a bus ride away, but this affected accessibility to sport facilities. Child O felt that, *'we need more space and facilities to be able to do a wider range of sports and more coaches'*.

Some pupils believed there was quite a sense of motivation and self-determination about sport. Child H said, *'it motivates quite a lot of people. There are people you can look up to as a role model. It's advertised a lot and on social media so people recognise more the hard work and dedication that it takes'*. They also spoke of sport inspiring them, Child G stating, *'what they do on the field, how they act. If they play well, like fancy tricks you always remember that'*. Child O spoke of influences on himself:

*'Kieran Reid for me. He is changing the world of Rugby and how it is played. We are all obsessed by change and that, we watch, are inspired by things that you can change and create. To take sport on, by the time we are playing as adults the game will have changed. Twenty years ago, the way cricket, rugby and football were played is different to now and it is going to develop even more, to be faster'*.

The wider world of sport does seem to act as an attraction and a catalyst for participation, with some pupils mentioning role models that they felt inspired them. A number of these were coaches, especially those who innovate, rather than players which was interesting and fits in with the leadership aspect they identified (see section 4.2.5).

This could inspire them in their play or simply to take part both inside and outside school. Image was also mentioned with the high-profile image of successful sport stars as one to look up to and emulate.

There was a split within the group of how important PE was. Some felt it was very important for health, relaxation and a future career. Others although agreeing it was important for health wished they could drop PE and concentrate on their other academic subjects which they did see as important.

Enjoyment was also linked to the importance of sport. Those who did not enjoy sport saw PE as less important, however, those who did enjoy it were more likely to say it was important. One pupil who did not enjoy PE inside school did enjoy it outside as he could choose what he wanted to do and participate with a friend with no pressure.

### *Participation (State School)*

The state school pupils talked about various aspects of participation. Their liking for sports tended to be influenced with regard to how good they were at the sport. Child D said, *'I don't like football as I'm not good at it'* but later added, *'I like swimming because I'm good at it'*. Child B seemed to base participation on being with others and said, *'don't really like swimming, it's more individual'*. They discussed the range of sports available at the school and wanting a challenge was important to some. Child B mentioned, *'We do drills like we did in Primary school and most people are ahead of that'*.

If they liked a sport, they were more likely to play it outside of school with Child S stating, *'I like netball and I play outside of school as well'* and Child B stating, *'I like football and I play outside of school and enjoy it'*. All the pupils in the focus group participated in some form of sport outside of school. The sports mentioned were netball, football, swimming, table tennis and dance. Reasons for participation in sport outside of school included enjoyment, meeting new people, improving your skills and experience. Child S speaking about participation said, *'Obviously, it's enjoyable. Because you do it outside of school you get to do it with people outside of school, not just those in PE. You get to know a wide range of people, in the club that you go to'* and then added as another benefit being *'experience as well'*. Child A felt, *'If you do it outside of school you feel at an advantage when you do it in School'* and Child B also was thinking along these lines mentioning, *'you play against better players, so you improve skills from them and learn from mistakes'*.

All the pupils did see PE as an important subject, Child C and Child E both said, *'it should be equal to other subjects'*. Although important, Child A saw it as more important to people who liked it, *'I think it should be equal, but it is less important because not everyone needs it like Maths and English and we focus on that. People who are not as into it think it's less important. People who are into it see it just as important'*. Enjoyment was also an indicator of importance. Child S mentioned a reason for participation as *'Obviously, it's enjoyable...'*

The pupils exhibited a desire to be able to influence sport through pupil voice and actually raised the issue of having greater voice. They had opinions on how things should be done and wanted an opportunity to express their views. Child C would like to, *'have kids influence the drills more instead of the coaches'*. Child S wanted a different approach by coaches, *'In netball we have matches on weekends and if we have done something wrong when we go to training they have a go at us for it. They should be understanding that we made a mistake and help us'*.

Child A felt that *'they should help us individually as in a match it's not the same thing that we have all done wrong'*. It does seem that children see an emphasis on telling them what they have done wrong rather than supporting them or praising them for what they have done right. They also have a desire for their voice to be heard on these issues.

They did see sport as a vehicle for all and a way to meet people. Child S talked about how, *'It brings people together'* and Child A added that, *'it's inclusive for everyone'*. They talked about their favourite sports stars and liked them for different reasons. Child B, who plays football outside of school said his favourite star was, *'Ronaldo because he is confident and never gives up'*. Child D who undertook swimming outside school spoke of his admiration for, *'Adam Peaty because he wins, and he always has a smile on his face. He came second in the Commonwealth and had a smile on his face'*. Thus, enjoyment of sport was a key factor with Child D. Both of these pupils had role models, favourite sports stars in the sport that they participated in outside of school, so maybe that is an element of attraction to participation? The definition of a sportsperson was, *'someone who is motivated- that would be for all sports'* according to Child A and as them having *'passion and ability'* as mentioned by Child B.

Child J did highlight that some sports you can do on your own as an individual but others you can only do in a team, *'Dance you can do it individually or in a team, whereas netball you can only do it in a team'*. Child D talked about swimming as *'an individual sport'*. It could therefore for some, be easier to engage in a sport if it was individual although other pupils mentioned that they enjoyed team sports more due to the social aspect.

### *Summary*

Thematic analysis indicated a number of second order constructs including enjoyment, opportunities, funding, challenge, motivation, voice, role models and importance. These were grouped under the conceptual theme of Participation (see Figure 6).

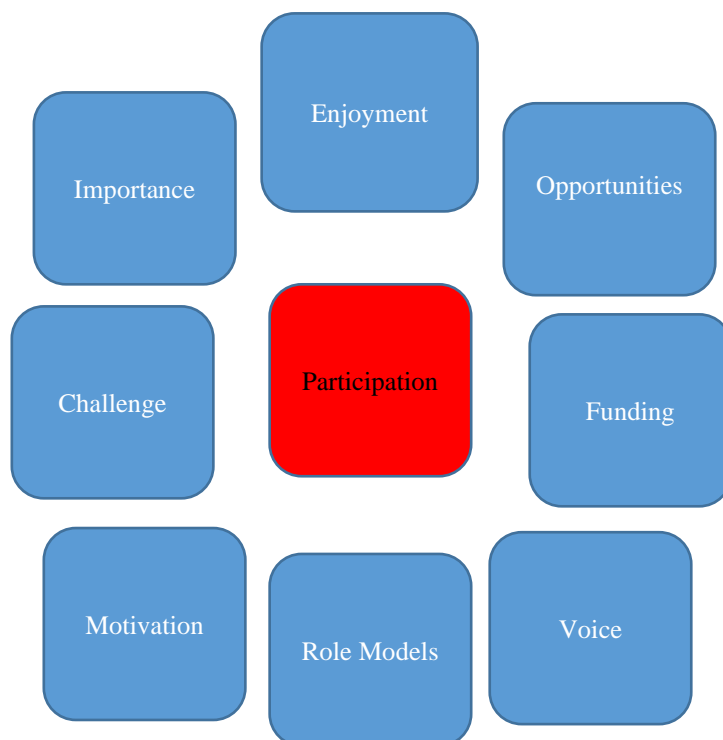


Figure 6: Second order constructs which provided conceptual theme of participation

#### **4.2.5 Theme 3: Development and Ability**

##### *Development and Ability (Independent School)*

The pupils indicated that the environment and resources of the school could be counterproductive to development. Although they felt the ethos of the school was that sport was important and thus participation had prestige attached to it, the resources did not necessarily match that aspiration and could affect enhancing ability. However, Child H did express that PE did develop their sporting skills.

They talked about ability and development in the longer-term participation in sport and potential careers. Child L stated that *'you can play sport for a long time when you are older'* and Child O mentioned that, *'you can obviously have a career in sport and the memories and friendships can last a long time'*. However, slightly less expected was the cognitive development that the pupils raised. They mentioned about cognitive skills that were developed through their learning and participation in PE at school. It also gave some a sense of responsibility and these skills translated into other academic subjects and into life in general. Child O felt that, *'it develops different sides of your brain, more problem solving and game side, not developed as much in academic lessons'*. The development of leadership skills

was also mentioned as an aspect of PE. Most felt that this was important as like most subjects they saw lessons as a vehicle to some benefit whether to improve their ability level, career or health. However, the two pupils who identified themselves as lower ability were less convinced about the merits of their PE lesson. Child F stated that PE was, *'more important for younger years as in year 11 you could do something more useful with your time'* and Child M said, *'it is useful, but I don't think it is useful in the same way as other subjects. You can use maths for a range of skills later in life but unless you play sport for recreational or professional purpose later in life then it isn't useful'*.

#### *Development and Ability (State School)*

Understandably they did see PE as enhancing their physical skills and contributing to their physique and skills needed for sport. Child A mentioned that it, *'builds up skills'*, and Child D spoke of, *'in swimming you are taught speed'*. Child E talked of *'balance'* and agility was cited by Child B, *'agility like in football you always need to be aware and confidence'* and by Child S, *'In netball like you need agility'*. Even when speaking of sports' skills, the softer skill of confidence emerged and similarly to the independent school they talked about the cognitive skills that PE develops such as communication skills which are transferable skills useful in other areas. Child S mentioned that PE was important *'because of fitness and communication, if you are quieter in school, it might help you build up skills that can help you in life'*. Child B stated that, *'football you need more awareness of what is around you in a game'*.

Some pupils talked about the experience achieved from participation in sport outside of school and the gain it gave them in PE at school. Child A felt, *'if you do it outside of school you feel at an advantage when you do it in school'* and Child S felt a benefit of outside participation was *'experience as well'*.

At times although it should be about development, sport outside of school may not be, as Child A suggested that, *'It should be about developing skills but sometimes it's not'*.

Ability was linked to development through setting classes with Child S stating, *'We are set in different classes on our ability so we can develop skills'*. Therefore, Child S felt that ability setting aided skill development in PE.

Thematic analysis produced second order constructs including cognition, careers, ability, skills, physique, environment and experience. These were grouped under the conceptual theme of Development and Ability (see Figure 7).

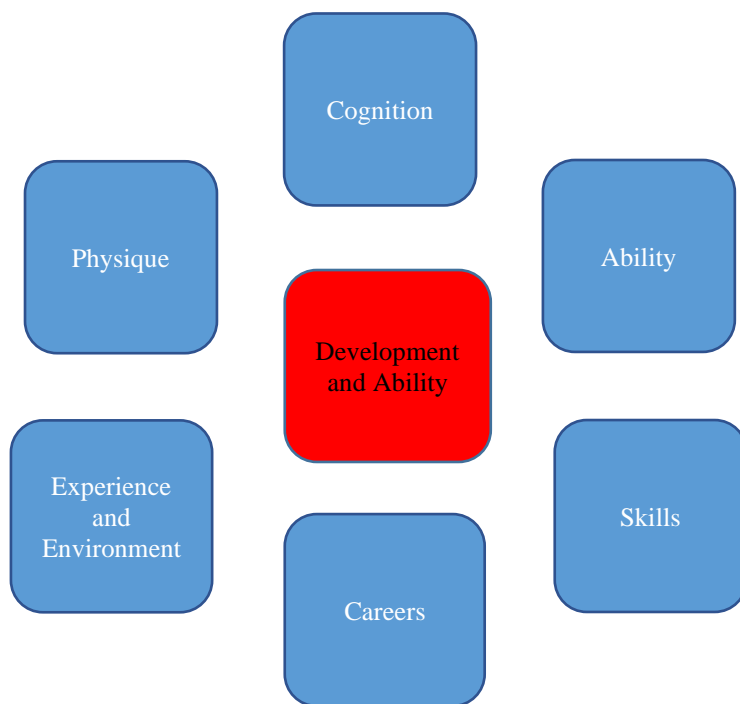


Figure 7: Second order constructs which provided conceptual theme of Development and Ability

#### 4.2.6 Theme 4: Health

##### *Health (Independent School)*

Not unexpectedly, physical health was cited as a benefit of PE and sport. Some participants thought that physical health was important, and PE was a conduit for such health. Child L spoke of such benefits, *'I still think we need to do sport though, need to run round and stuff and health benefits. If you just sit in classroom all day, then PE gives health benefits'*.

Mental health was also linked to PE and support with the positive aspects being it could relax them and alleviate the stress of their other lessons. Principally because it was a different type of lesson, where they could run around and let off some steam, but also it relieved the pressure, felt by some of their GCSEs in other subjects, where they were striving and being driven towards external exams in a school which has excellent exam results. Child H talked about *'We have classes that stress us out, PE is important as it relaxes you and allows you to focus your mind'*.

##### *Health (State School)*

Once again, the beneficial aspects of PE on health were stated by the group. Child D spoke of *'feel better about yourself and look forward to doing it'*. Child S said PE was important, *'because of fitness...'*. The message on



physical health and exercise seems to have been received by all group participants. Similar to the independent school, the pupils raised the issue of mental health. Not as many pupils mentioned it as the independent school, but it was still raised as an issue.

### *Summary*

Thematic analysis indicated mental and physical health in the second order constructs. These were grouped under the conceptual theme of Health (see Figure 8).



Figure 8: Second order constructs which provided conceptual theme of Health

### **4.2.7 Theme 5: Pressure**

#### *Pressure (Independent School)*

A considerable theme was that of pressure. Some pupils felt extrinsic pressure from peers, parents or coaches when they performed in team sports. They felt judged and criticised although they saw the way they reacted to such pressure as important. Child L mentioned, *‘People criticise but you have to take that on board and take what you want from it. It’s about how you react’*. A number of the pupils particularly those identifying as higher ability felt a more intrinsic pressure. They put pressure on themselves as they wanted to do well because it was important to them. They felt an inner sense of letting themselves, their teachers and teammates down, if they did not perform well in a match. The higher the stakes in the match the greater the pressure. Child L talked about the game causing the pressure, *‘there is not so much pressure from parents but from the game depending on how close it is’*. Child O felt that it was to do with the level you play at:

*‘It depends on how high a standard you play. I used to play high level cricket where members of the public watch not just parents and everyone has opinions, how you react to those opinions, what you do with them or whether you ignore them. It can be hard to ignore them, some people have stronger opinions than others, some have strong*

*opinions about you or the game and it is just how you manage that, do you change or just ignore. If nothing was said and opinions not shared the world would be a blander place. Pressure is something you put on yourself and it is changed by people, pressure is not an actual thing it is put on by yourself and others so it is how you feel about the sport and that which changes the pressure or the feeling you get about the sport. It's how much you care about the sport which changes the emotion about the sport'.*

In this quote Child O encapsulates quite a range of issues to do with pressure. These include the pressure of high-level performance with public audiences, and in his opinion, this is part of sport at this level, so handling such pressure is the key factor. Although the negative context of pressure is apparent, Child O argues that it makes sport interesting, and it can be dictated not only by the level you are playing at but also by the sport and the emotion felt towards said sport.

Child G linked pressure with performance but did feel that some people may need it. He stated that:

*'Pressure can affect performance and your thinking about a game. Jordan Henderson [England Footballer, who missed penalty in 2018 World Cup] if he took a penalty in the back garden would score 10 out of 10, that's how it can affect. Some people it affects positively, some people need that to help them perform in that way. Some people, it does affect'.*

#### *Pressure (State School)*

The pressure the pupils face in PE and sport outside of school was also raised in the state school. They talked about being judged and the criticism that they face if they make a mistake and that they should be given support instead. They felt mistakes had a consequence and some of the pupils, who identified as higher ability, spoke of the pressure they face in competition outside of school. Child D spoke of, *'people watching outside of school puts more pressure on you'* and *'competing against other people and their parents shouting, it's not very pleasant'*. Child B followed this up and added, *'you lose confidence sometimes, people are on your back all the time, it takes the fun away, it's more serious'* and *'it's harder to make mistakes in that environment'*. This is especially true when the stakes are high in a swimming gala as Child D indicated, *'if you make a mistake in a race, it can get you disqualified really easily. If you dive in weird you can get disqualified'*.

If they could change things Child S would have, *'coaches are not as strict, so it's less demanding like you need to do it'* and Child B would have *'parents keep quiet more'*. This pressure is very real to the pupils especially to those who compete in sport outside of school.

### *Summary*

Thematic analysis indicated a number of second order constructs including criticism, internal pressure, external pressure, mistakes and support. These were grouped under the conceptual theme of Pressure (see Figure 9).

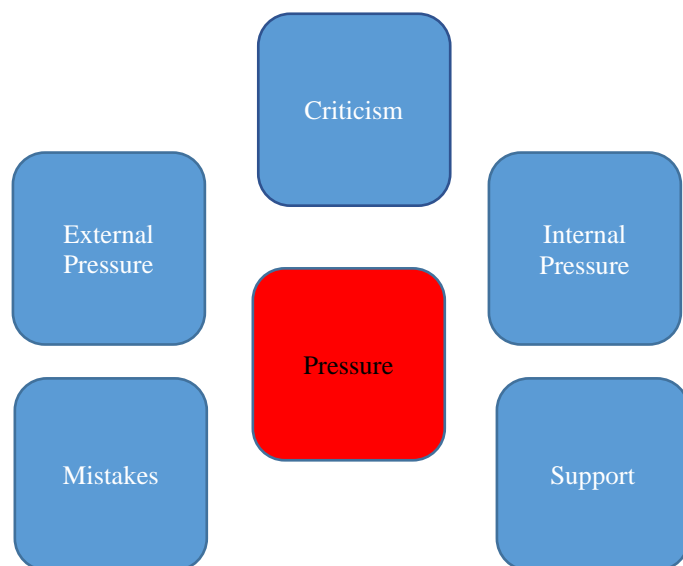


Figure 9: Second order constructs which provided conceptual theme of Pressure

### **4.3 Conceptual Themes**

All the constructs and themes link to the conceptual themes of:

- Choice
- Participation
- Development and Ability
- Health
- Pressure

Although, these have emerged as key themes from pupil voice they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they are all linked in some manner. For example, during the focus groups pupils spoke of having choice would make them more likely to participate. These links become more apparent in the questionnaire and interviews and are explored extensively in Chapters 5-10, where they are referred to simply as ‘themes’ rather than ‘conceptual themes’.

Health, development and ability, choice, participation and pressure are social constructs. This study through the voice of pupils can describe individual experiences of such constructs but the concepts are different for different people, and they represent a range rather than a singularity.

#### **4.4 Comparison between the two Schools**

Although the two schools are very different, one being a single-gender independent school in a middle-class suburb and the other being a mixed gender state school in a socially deprived area, the themes that were extrapolated from the focus groups were very similar. They all talked about similar issues to some degree especially with regard to health, choice, development and ability, pressure and participation. Slight differences occurred such as the depth of the discussion on some topics. The independent school pupils talked more about role models, inspiration, careers, opportunities and facilities. However, the state school seemed to have a desire to have an influence upon activities and the curriculum offered by the school and actually mentioned pupil voice.

In general, the same concepts apply to both schools and are not particular to one environment. As a result, the generated conceptual themes from across the two schools were broad enough to act as a theoretical arc for all issues raised and enabled a consistent application of themes moving into the questionnaire survey phase.

The themes generated from these focus groups were then translated into the survey questions for the whole year groups in both schools. The pupils from the focus group piloted the questionnaire survey and checked to see if the survey did indeed represent their thoughts and the issues raised in their focus group (see Chapter 3).

#### **4.5 Questionnaire Survey and Interviews Findings**

Chapters 5-9 present the findings and analysis of the questionnaire survey and interviews. Throughout these sections quantitative data is displayed. However, as mentioned in the Methodology (see section 3.4.2) this is not a mixed methods study, but numeric data is utilised. The numeric data helps broaden their voice, and indeed on occasions it is hidden voice that speaks to me once it is cross-referenced between certain issues (i.e., less able and pressure). Without numeric data such rich and broad voice, which gives an indication of range, would not have been captured. This numeric data adds to their qualitative stories rather being seen as statistically significant in any way. Applying any form of statistical significance would have been a juxtaposition to phenomenological approach. Although, the numeric data was gathered using SPSS, it was analysed using the same thematic analysis approach as the qualitative data. The numeric data adds to the tapestry of pupil voice, enables hidden voice to be heard and can be considered as numeric qualitative rather than traditional quantitative data.

## Chapter 5. Theme: Choice

‘I’d just make it all optional’ (Edward, SS)

### 5.1 Findings: Choice

Having a choice in PE was a theme which was raised by pupils in both focus groups and consequently the questionnaire survey looked at this issue to ascertain the breadth across the year groups and subsequent interviews added depth. There seemed to be contrasting findings in the survey when children from both schools were asked if they had a choice (see Table 4). Although the independent school focus group raised the issue of choice in much more depth than the state school, the survey data suggested that the independent school pupils do have a choice, but the state school pupils do not have a choice.

Pupils who felt they had a choice in PE	Percentage
Independent School	87% (n=20, N=23)
State School	9% (n=12, N=131)

Table 4: Pupils who felt they had a choice in PE

These findings were more emphatic than suggested in the focus groups. In the focus group it was the Independent school that raised the issue more than the state school, however, this suggests that the state school pupils feel very strongly that they do not have choice in PE.

The main reasons cited for not having a choice in order of greater occurrence were:

- 1) Teacher decides (n=83)
- 2) Only occasional pupil input (n=8)
- 3) Rota of Sports (n=4)

The main reasons cited for having a choice in order of greater occurrence were:

- 1) Variety of sports (n=11)
- 2) Some class preference but go with majority (n=8)

#### 5.1.1 Teacher Choice

Most of the children who disagreed that they had a choice in PE stated that the reason for this was because the teacher decides what they do. A common response from the pupils clarifying their answer demonstrated the power and decision-making resting with the teacher with comments such as, ‘*because the teachers always choose what we*

*do and we never have a choice*’ and *‘no choice whatsoever, we have never had a choice’*. However, there was a suggestion of compulsion in some responses such as *‘you are forced to do what sport the teacher says’* and *‘we have to do what they tell you’*. Thus, not only did some pupils not feel they had any choice, they felt compelled against their will to take part. The choice continuum could range from the choice not to participate in PE to full choice over participation. This is quite an emotive stance, deeper than simply not enjoying, as it does not seem accepting of the curriculum.

Some pupils did seem to exhibit a greater degree of acceptance of the system, demonstrated in a number of ‘rota’ comments such as *‘we all have to follow a rota’* and *‘it’s one sport each term’*.

The interviews supported this desire to have a choice and the reality of not having a choice.

*‘We’re on a curriculum, so we’re just told, “Oh yes, this term you’re doing swimming, football,” something like that. I think we should be able to choose, yes. Different teachers should do different games, and we should just be able to say, “Well, I’d like to do that this week, but something else next week.” Something we’re quite confident with.’* (Edward, SS).

Edward (SS) made an interesting final point linking choice to feeling confident in participating.

There also seemed to be the issue of the monotony of sports and not engaging in a variety as voiced by Elaine (SS):

*‘There was one point where I seemed to be doing swimming every term, and I was, like, “We should switch.” I don’t know if the school hadn’t been bothered to change, to switch it around, or if it just happened to end up being that way, but it was, like, “Quite a few of us have asked, since we’ve already done this much of swimming, can we switch it to something else?” but they never really did that.’*

### **5.1.2 Choice and Gender**

There was disquiet about certain sports being omitted such as *‘what sports we do are chosen for us and a lot of the time, we don’t get to play certain sports (for example basketball)’*.

Although not exclusively, this feeling had greater representation amongst females, with one pupil stating in the survey *‘I feel as though sometimes girls don’t get to do some sports’*. This feeling presented in the interviews as well:

*'I've always had that kind of view, where I think sports should be open for everyone. Because I've always enjoyed football, I came to secondary and I was really, really gutted that we didn't seem to do football in PE lessons.'*  
(Elaine, SS).

Most pupils interviewed did demonstrate an awareness that sports can be gender restricted in some way but equally did not see any reason to justify why this should be the case.

Another difference between PE and other subjects emerged from one pupil from the state school stating, *'I wouldn't change sport outside of school but inside I would want the girls and boys to be able to do all the sports, want to feel less pressured and forced to do things'*.

This quote suggests an awareness that girls and boys can be segregated when it comes to PE possibly to stereotyping and socio-cultural tradition. It also alludes to a coercive element and pressure which choice could rectify. This gendered difference in sporting activities was clearly apparent in the participation rates for sports such as netball which seems to be only offered to girls (see Chapter 6). This would not happen in any other school subject so why is it allowed to happen in PE?

The gender segregation of sporting opportunity was also recognised in the Independent school even though it was all boys. Frank (IS) contrasted his experience with his female cousins:

*'So, like, I know for a fact my cousins are in Year 7, and they're both girls, and they do a lot of netball, hockey, and that's completely different to what we do here. It's football, and rugby, and cricket and stuff like that, and that's just not offered for girls.'*

The pupils tended to rationalise that this discrepancy could be an indicator of the perception that opportunity can be limited due to a historic traditional background pervading sport:

*'I think it depends on, say, if there is a mixed school, and in PE they did football, rugby and basketball. Those are sports that are more common for boys to do. I'm not saying girls don't enjoy them, but that's what is more common.'*  
(Gary, IS).

These traditional views of gendered sports participation were also raised by Frank (IS), although he felt such practice was outdated and on the verge of change:

*'Well, you know in the past it's been very, sort of, separate education, and it's been the traditional thoughts of, like, "This is what boys do. This is what girls do. This is how boys should be treated. This is how girls should be treated. This is what they should do," etc. I think we're just coming to, like, the end of that. I reckon people are starting to realise that it doesn't really matter, and everyone should be treated the same, and everyone should just be able to do exactly the same things that they want to do.'* (Frank, IS).

Elaine (SS) was adamant that all pupils should do all sports but that peer pressure from deeply ingrained stereotypes would make a choice of a sport associated with the opposite gender to be a substantial barrier:

*'It shouldn't be stereotypical, to be... It shouldn't be a boys' sport. There shouldn't be a girls' sport. We've got a dance team at school, and there're no lads in that. That really frustrates me....It shouldn't be like that, but there hasn't really been any way of, sort of, saying to people, "Come on, join".'*

Although Karen (SS) suggested it is possible that some girls dislike particular sports and choice would allow participation for girls in the sports they enjoyed:

*'I feel like we should have surveys where we could choose what we wanted to do for the term because I feel like people who don't like the sport that we get put into, for example, swimming. All the girls hate swimming because of their hair getting wet, and things like that. If they didn't have to do that, I think maybe they would try harder and people would get more benefits from it.'*

Karen (SS) also felt such choice would aid enjoyment amongst girls and prevent coercion currently suffered:

*'I feel like it would have a big impact because people would be doing things they enjoyed, as well, instead of a girl being put on a football pitch. Then, as well, people just get shoved in goal and things...'*

Although choice could also have a negative effect on gender participation as Elaine (SS) suggested that given choice girls may self-select certain sports that they do not want to if they feel it does not meet gender requirements and prevent other girls from participating:

*'I was, like, "Well, I'm not the only one who wants to do football," but then all the other girls who didn't want to do it would be complaining. They're, like, "No, we can't do football. It's a boys' sport".'*

Although many of the comments in the questionnaire survey and issues raised in the interviews suggested that females as a group had less choice than males, analysis of responses to the survey indicated that it was an equal issue for both genders. Controlling for gender responses in the state school alone attested there was no discernible difference with regard to choice, 10.2% (n=5) of females felt there was choice compared to 8.8% (n=7) of males which are both low and of similar value. This is repeated when analysing those pupils who strongly disagreed that they had choice with 49% (n=24) of females and 47.5% (n=38) of males in this category.

### **5.1.3 Choice and Ability**

Maybe this vocalised female choice issue (yet apparent equal gender dissatisfaction) can be explained in the terms that females were not the only group feeling that choice may be different for them. *'We don't get a choice and the higher set people seem to get the more fun, challenging sports'* was a comment by a pupil self-identifying as less



able in the survey. This comment is deeper than choice suggesting enjoyment, excitement and development are being deprived from less able pupils. Controlling for ability in relation to choice, pupils who agreed they were of good ability in PE were more likely to think they had a choice in PE with 19.4% strongly agreeing that they had a choice. This compares with 0% of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed to having good ability feeling they had a choice. Of those who strongly disagreed to having a choice in PE this grew steadily lower down the ability range. Thus, the percentages of pupils who identified as high ability were less likely to strongly disagree that they had choice compared with those who identified as low ability. Strongly disagreeing to having choice correlates to ability and increases on the spectrum when moving from strongly agree to strongly disagree regarding high ability (see Figure 10).

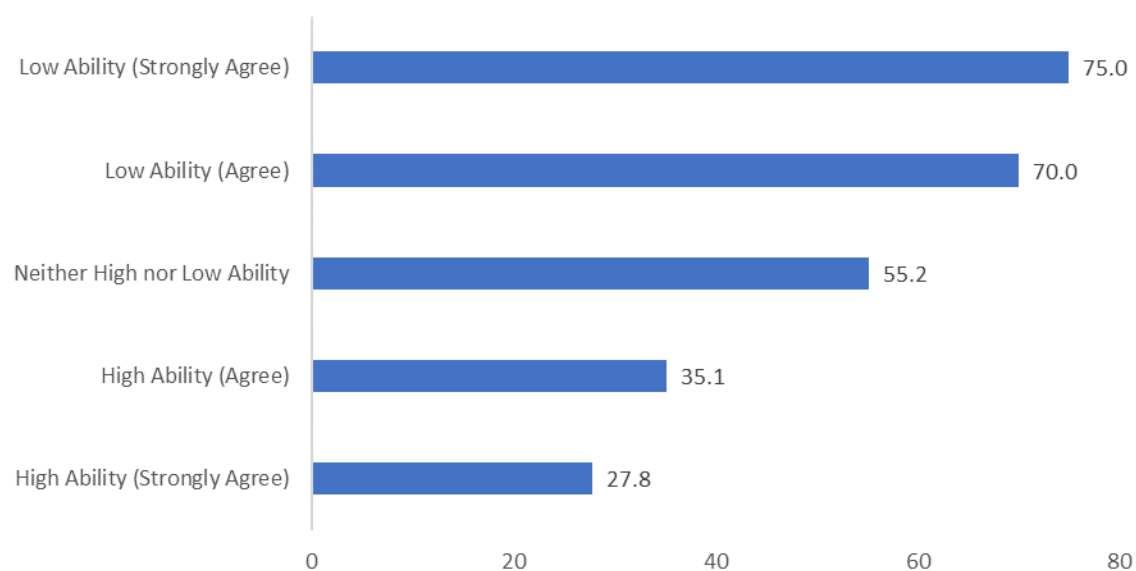


Figure 10: Pupils strongly disagreeing to having choice in PE in correlation to ability level (%)

The percentages reflected are 27.8%, 35.1%, 55.2%, 70%, 75% so there does seem to be an ability effect on the perspective of pupils when they consider whether or not they have a choice in PE. This was equally apparent for males and females so may account for a female of low ability not having a choice but linking that to gender rather than ability? Could it be that higher ability do have more of a choice?

The end of Karen’s (SS) comment (section 5.1.2) did tend to suggest less choice when actually playing sport when you are less able i.e., you are ‘shoved in goal’. In the independent school Michael spoke of when they were all forced to do one thing the less able lost out:

*‘it got much worse when we were all forced to do this one thing but not everybody could do the thing, so we just ended up sitting there, obviously not playing the rugby.’*

Once again this suggests a feeling of compulsion against their will but then the less able being seen as lesser pupils and actually being left out of the activity. Although a pupil identifying as high ability the independent school felt the school has a more paternal view of less able pupils and they were not forced to do anything:

*'They give them the opportunity to do something that they may not do. They also give them quite a lot of praise for if they do something well. I think it's quite good for them because they possibly may not enjoy it as much, but they get given a variety of stuff that they could do and they're not forced to do something that they don't want to.'* (Luke, IS)

There does seem to be a clear culture in the independent school that rugby in particular is for the more able:

*'I was saying when you have a choice in PE, you can either stay outside and play the sport the term is, or you can go into the gym and do that. It tends to be the more able of the people who play that sport, so say the rugby team, the more able rugby players will stay outside and play rugby, and the less able ones will go inside and try and practice other sports and get better at those.'* (Gary, IS).

Michael (IS) did suggest that choice does seem to be something for the high ability and not for the low ability or those with a disorder:

*'For me, I was saying about my dyspraxia, because of that, I got ruled out in playing rugby matches, ruled out in playing football matches, ruled out in playing all these other matches. As a result, they created multi-sports which is more helpful, but they've singled us out from everybody else. Everybody else is doing all these matches and we're stuck in the gym.'*

Solutions to this 'problem' for less able pupils ranged from one pupil saying they could improve to two pupils suggesting PE itself could become optional. James (IS) felt that if the less able developed in the gym then there could be a pathway to join the higher ability:

*'With the choice in games, say if you worked well in the gym and wanted to try going for the B team in football training, then try and build your way from there.'*

Although two pupils who identified as lower ability in PE from both schools did not see this as a potential solution and felt their time could be spent more productively outside PE:

*'Now, Year 11, it's right at the bottom because I've got exams, and that's, like, three, four hours a week which could be spent working, revising, and it's just being thrown away. It's not as if I'm improving. It's, quite frankly, a waste of time. I could be doing something better.'* (Frank, IS)

Clearly, Frank (IS) considered his academic work to be more important and did not place any value on PE, based upon his experience. Similarly, Edward (SS) held some strong views based upon negative experiences in PE and felt choice in PE should extend to non-participation:

*'I'd just make it all optional. I wouldn't want it to be compulsory. I'd want people to have a choice in what they could do and not be told, "You're doing PE on Tuesday and Thursday." It's a bit... You should have a choice, really. That's what I'd do.'* (Edward, SS).

When asked if they felt pupils could influence what happens in PE through evaluations, the higher ability pupils were once again more likely to say they could but not in large numbers, 17.6% of those whom 'strongly agreed' to being high ability also 'strongly agreed' to feeling they had influence. This compared to 0% of the 'disagreed' and 'strongly disagreed' high ability categories feeling they had influence. Once again this does suggest that higher ability pupils feel they have more influence, but this is still not the majority of higher ability pupils who feel this way.

#### **5.1.4 Existing Types of Choice**

There was some indication of rare choices, but these tended to be linked to a particular teacher, *'unless we have Miss X, I don't think we get a choice'* or choice was given exceptionally *'because we don't get a choice unless on very special occasions'*. Even this infrequent choice tended not to be individual choice but collective choice. One child remarked *'sometimes if the class doesn't like the sport choice, then they might change it to class's preference'* and another stated *'sometimes we get the option of what we want to do in PE. The majority pick football'*. This raises the issue of the level of choice, is it an individual decision or a group decision and do pupils see choice in terms of themselves as individuals or the collective?

The dichotomy between collective choice and individual choice was also played out in responses to questions about what they would change regarding PE and Sport in the survey. The pupils use 'us' a lot when referring to choice such as *'yes, let us pick the sport'*; *'let us choose a sport'*; and *'...have a group decision for what we do'*. This tends to imply that more pupils view choice as a collective option rather than an individual one. Could this be because participation in PE tends to be as part of a team or collective?

In the interviews both Ann (SS) and Charles (SS) suggested that collective choice would not be a panacea:

*'...we would probably just pick the football every time.'* (Charles, SS)

*'I think in my class, if we did have a choice, there would be some girls saying like, "Oh, can we do football?" and that, but then the majority would be like, "Oh, we'd rather do this," and then it would go with the majority. So, I don't think it would make a difference.'* (Ann, SS).

In the independent school Michael also alluded to any choice being collective:

*'We have the badminton courts set up in the gym occasionally, but we don't play any more as much because it's just what everybody else votes for.'*

Therefore, it appears when choice is offered it is collective rather than individual and that does not necessarily meet everyone's needs.

Some pupils saw variety as choice. Thus, if the school offered a range of sports, then they were more likely to feel they did have a choice. Comments such as *'there are a wide range of sports that you can take part in'*, support this perspective as variety meaning choice. The independent school was far more likely to claim they had this kind of choice than the state school. On the surface there seemed to be a fair choice of activity per PE lesson. One pupil at the independent school summed it up as:

*'We have an option to do Rugby at [Local Club] RFC, football on the astroturf, basketball/badminton/ dodgeball in the hall and strength and conditioning/circuits in the gym.'*

Oscar (IS) also saw variety as choice in the independent school:

*'So, throughout the year, different terms would offer a range of different sports. So, for example, we're now in the spring term which would offer football as a priority, or other sports like table tennis, hockey; badminton is often going on in the gym. So, it's a range of sports which is different to the summer term which would offer cricket as the primary sport...'*

However, this is not the straightforward choice it seems. The focus group in the independent school suggested that they did not have a choice which is at odds with the questionnaire survey findings. This was examined again in the interviews to shed more light on the reality of the situation and the pupils participating in the interviews from the independent school clarified the choice process in their school. As already ascertained, if a pupil is low ability, they are not allowed to undertake the team sports and have to go to the gym/hall where they do get a choice of activity. However, Child M in the focus group stressed about his desire to play football but he was not allowed to as that was for the high ability pupils who played in the school teams. Thus, although he had a limited choice of activity, he could not choose the outside team sports. This situation did not just reflect low ability as likewise, if you were a member of a sport's team you were expected to participate in the team sports outside and not the sports on offer in the gym/hall:

*'Well, if you get picked for a team you do that, and you do your most dominant sport. But say if you are not that much into your sport, you get a choice.'* (James, IS)

Although Oscar (IS) felt they did have choice he did go on to clarify that:

*'However, that choice might be affected by what teams you play for, what choices your mates make, and stuff like that.'*

Therefore, on the surface there seemed to be a choice, and this was supported by the survey result. However, the pupils have to take the team sports pathway or gym pathway depending on their ability and that is not a choice. If they are low ability, and in the gym, there can be a choice but sometimes this is a group choice and not an individual choice. The high ability have to do their team sport, and the better they are at a team sport the greater the expectation there is for them to undertake that sport. In reality the high ability pupils have less of a choice than the lower ability, but they feel like they have more choice.

### **5.1.5 Choice to Represent the School**

Pupils also raised the issue of choice in relation to representing the school at sport and giving all a chance. Such comments included, *‘Inside of school more of a chance for other people to get into the top teams eg trials’* and *‘make it more fair’*. Thus, operating a system that gives people a chance and is fair is another dimension to their version of choice in PE. Elaine (SS) felt strongly that there was not any choice when it came to representing the school and in fact it was a quite unfair system. However, another pupil in the same school (Robert) did feel that it was a choice for everyone to go along to the training although that did not mean being part of the team. Pupils in the independent school were substantially more likely to feel that their school used a fair system to select pupils for sport’s teams (see Table 5).

<b>Pupils Feel School has a fair system to pick sport’s teams</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Independent School	78.2% (n=18)
State School	33.9% (n=44)

Table 5: Pupils feel School has a fair system to pick sport’s teams

Pupils who participated in sport outside of school were more likely to think school has a fair system. This could be because they have higher level ability due to additional participation out of school and thus, they are more likely to get selected for the school teams.

Analysing the state school results separately, males and females had similar views about the fairness or unfairness of the selection procedures.

35% (n=28) males thought selection was fair whereas 34% (n=27) thought it was unfair

34% (n=17) females thought it was fair whereas 43% (n=21) thought it was unfair

It was quite an even split between males thinking it was fair or not and females thinking it was fair. The biggest discrepancy came from females who think it was unfair. This concurred with accusations of favouritism when it came to team selection (See Chapter 6).

There also does seem to be an ability relationship, with 31% of those strongly identifying with high ability feeling the school had a fair system but 0% of lesser ability feeling the school had a fair system. The less able could feel that they do not have a chance to represent the school just as they do not think the school supports them in PE, with these results being very similar. However, the more able who are more likely to be selected feel the selection is fair. Thus, it depends upon perspective from their ability level, and it is apparent that the less able feel discriminated against in this process.

### **5.1.6 Choice and Change**

In the questionnaire survey, when asked whether they would change anything about PE or sport outside of school one of the main themes to emerge in their responses was that of choice. It was the most common response for females and second most for males which demonstrates the importance of choice to pupils. It seemed to be driven by having a more enjoyable experience, *‘make it more fun, let pupils choose what we do’* and to prevent monotony, *‘to choose what different types of sports we do. Don’t always do the same sports’*.

Pupils did not just state they wanted choice but offered solutions to create such choice. Elaine (SS) reflected this position and felt that choice would lead to greater engagement in sport:

*‘I think there should be something or, I guess, maybe, a system in place where students can say what sports they prefer, and maybe they could focus on the ones that they prefer because it would be more enjoyable. A lot more people would get involved, because they always do seem to complain, mainly about girls being lazy, and sat there, like, “Come on, join in.” If they had something that they’d like to join in with, maybe that would be different.’*

A degree of logistical understanding was also displayed with one pupil stating, *‘In school be given a choice between 2+ sports every lesson’*.

Edward (SS) suggested a solution of different sports on offer from the different teachers and choosing on a weekly basis:

*‘I think we should be able to choose, yes. Different teachers should do different games, and we should just be able to say, “Well, I’d like to do that this week, but something else next week.” Something we’re quite confident with.’*

There was a feeling from some pupils that they would like to add to sports on offer and that this would lead to greater incentive with suggestions such as *‘PE in school- add Dance as an activity; sport outside of school-find something to do alongside the gym’*.

The seeds of desire for pupil voice and influence also emerged with pupils requesting, *‘I could choose my participated sport. Have a voice with my teammates’* and *‘In PE I would like to have a say in the sports we do’*.

Pupils also raised another category of choice of ‘how they do PE’ (alongside optional PE and what they do in PE), *‘Make it more exercise based than competitive’* and *‘I would change the fact we can’t change what sports we do and also the competitiveness’*, suggests for some children a curriculum and pedagogy based upon physical exercise in a non-competitive environment would be more engaging for them. The desire for a less competitive environment was also raised in the interviews and linked directly to having choice, with Edward (SS) stating:

[if Choice] *‘Well, obviously, I’d go into games where I’m a lot more comfortable and where other people would be comfortable doing that. So, I think the games would be a lot less competitive. They’d just be a bit more for fun.’*

This does expose a key difference of PE compared with other subjects where pupils tend to be judged on their individual merits, rather than in direct competition with other classmates as in PE.

#### **5.1.7 Choice of whom to participate with in PE**

Another method and process to emerge was the choice to keep pupils of the same ability in the same sets when undertaking PE, *‘Keep the groups balanced, don’t mix groups, give students more choice of what to do’* and *‘Yes, only work with your own sets and get more of a choice what to do’*, were two of the requests in this section. This is an interesting emergence of a fourth dimension to choice, which is not only about what they do, optional PE, or how they do it, but is also whom they do PE with.

Michael (IS) did also talk about playing with different people. He felt being able to play sport with supportive people would be advantageous:

*‘On football different people are more supportive and you can end up, in theory, boosting your confidence and actually getting better and then similarly in the gym, rather than just having all the bad people over here and all the good people over here...’*

However, Robert (IS) did feel that if pupils are in a sport they do not want to be involved in they would hold back other members of the group on a developmental basis and thus choice would prevent this problem and let pupils develop:

*'So, if we've got a sport that they don't particularly like, they just shut down and they don't really try, so that can also hold the group back as well. So, I think if everyone picked a sport that they like to do, then it would be at a higher ability, higher standard.'*

Thus, both lower and higher ability groups feel that to choose who were involved in participation a sport would actually enhance development for all pupils in that sport.

### **5.1.8 Summary**

It does appear that there is a strong desire by pupils to have a voice in PE and to be able to choose if they do it, what activity they do, how they do it and who they do it with. The latter being seen as a group they are more comfortable with and have equal ability.

## **5.2 Discussion**

The findings explore the feelings, opinions, issues and experiences of pupils who take part in PE lessons in the two secondary schools. It also reflects to a lesser degree their experiences of sport outside school as PE can be a continuum for some pupils and not something that is discrete to inside school. In the independent school there were quite blurred lines between sport inside and outside school, especially when it came to rugby.

The aim of this research was to give a voice to pupils who wanted to participate and wanted to be heard. Much of the past and contemporary research does not take account of pupil voice or if it does it is influenced by adult voice or involving pupils with an adult problem and calling that pupil voice. Thus, as this study is driven by pupil voice and is about highlighting pupil voice it does not seek to justify what pupils say or place degrees of relevance of why they said it. With that in mind the purpose of this discussion (and those in other chapters) is that it focuses upon making sense of what they say in light of other research and conceptual framework to give weight and strength to their voice.

### **5.2.2 Types of Choice**

The findings from the pupils in the state and independent schools suggest that pupils feel they do not have choice and indeed want more choice when it comes to PE. Although initially it appears that the pupils in the independent school feel they have a choice and the state school pupils feel they do not have a choice. This finding would reinforce the socio-economic element of choice in PE apparent in the study by Smith et al (2009). However, the comments regarding choice in the independent school tended to be linked to ability which appears to be a key factor with less able feeling they had less choice and influence. Pupils in the independent school spoke of the less able going to the gym and the more able playing team sports on the field and thus this limited their opportunity to choose



different sports even if the desire to do them was there such as Michael (IS) wanting to play football but having to go to the gym. He also expressed about the time when they were playing rugby but the less able ended up sitting by the side lines instead of being involved. Although it appeared to be perception, with the higher ability feeling they had more choice than the lower ability, as in the reality of the situation neither group particularly had a choice. When reflecting on the comments of the pupils in the independent school through their contribution to the focus groups, questionnaire survey and interviews it becomes apparent that this choice is theoretical rather than actual. The ability of the pupils as deemed by the teachers propels all participants on one of two pathways being that of the higher ability playing team sports on the field and the lower being consigned to activity in the gym. There is a compulsion that the higher ability will engage in these team sports as they represent the school at said sport and even though lower ability wanted to engage in these sports they were despatched to the offer in the gym. It could be the pupils' beliefs about PE influenced their attitudes (Hagger et al, 2002; Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). However, across both schools, pupil voice does indicate an association between ability of a pupil and perception of choice, this included the choice to undertake PE with pupils of similar ability (discussed further in section 5.2.5).

Although some pupils saw variety as choice a number viewed PE as having a lack of variety. Elaine (SS) mentioned about the monotony of constantly doing swimming. Such a repetitive curriculum can cause a decline in attitude to PE (Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). Range of sports can be seen as choice by pupils, but it can also be seen as an inhibitor due to some sports not being offered on the curriculum. Choice is on many occasions limited to team games which are overrepresented (Smith et al, 2009) and it does not extend to individual or more contemporary sports or physical activity such as dance (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; MacPhail et al, 2003; Smith et al, 2009). Facilities, staff and staff expertise are also seen as factors in choice alongside the dichotomy of collective versus individual choice. If staff are not versed in certain sports, then it may be harder to deliver although professional development can or should accommodate such developments (El Sherif, 2014). Resources such as facilities can limit choice as mentioned by pupils in the independent school, but schools can invest in these areas if they deem it to be important enough. Choice in fact can be no choice when it is made by the teachers (Smith et al, 2009; El Sherif, 2014). This can also apply to collective choice in the face of individual request and desire.

Some pupils such as Frank (IS) and Edward (SS) wanted choice in PE to mean it was optional. They and others felt a coercion and pointlessness regarding participation. Such attitudes are based upon pupils' beliefs and feelings (Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007) and PE teachers need to be cognisant of this to promote positive attitudes with regard to engagement (Birtwistle and Brodie, 1991). Pupils also indicate that choice involved the way PE is undertaken, with many citing that they wished they could choose non-competitive PE, which may prevent alienation from participation (Brooks and Magnusson, 2006).

The choice pupils want or the choice that is prohibited is seen on many levels and features a number of facets. Choice in PE through the voice of the pupils can include, optional PE, curriculum and activity, process and

personnel. Not only do they want to have a choice of the sport/activity but equally important is whom they undertake that activity with. This process is not about friendship groups as that was rarely mentioned, which is a contrary finding to Smith et al (2009), it tends to be about ability and development. Gender (discussed in section 5.2.4) does appear with regard to females possibly having less choice through their own volition or by design of the curriculum and processes by their teachers (Smith et al, 2009). Choice of opportunity to do certain sports seem to be gender stereotyped and the survey demonstrated a more limited range for boys (Smith et al, 2009; Guardian, 2017).

### ***5.2.3 Benefits of Choice***

The pupils who took part in this study were in Years 10 and 11. This is the age range where according to a number of studies, positive attitudes towards PE decline on an age-related basis (Birtwistle and Brodie, 1991; Shropshire et al, 1997; Prochaska et al, 2003; Safvenbom et al, 2014). This was apparent in some of the interviews with Elaine from the state school speaking of preferring PE in primary school and Frank from the independent school accepting an importance of PE for younger children but questioning its relevance for pupils in year 10 and 11. Thus, the choice of activity or even not to participate as mentioned by Frank (IS) and Edward (SS) could empower the children. It could be argued on grounds of health benefits and school organisation that allowing children to choose not to participate is detrimental but actually giving choice of activity may banish such feelings and may make pupils want to participate. Giving children (in particular, older children) a choice of PE activity could be beneficial for participation into adulthood (Trudeau and Shepard, 2008; El Sherif, 2014). For example, Frank (IS) who felt that it was pointless participating in PE was involved in dance outside of school. If dance was on offer in school, then he may view PE in a totally different way. This adds to the argument for PE teachers to structure the curriculum, environment and lesson to embrace the needs of all pupils and to counter any growing dissatisfaction (Prochaska et al, 2003). Giving pupils a voice in this process is critical to its success (Gunter and Thomson, 2007; El Sherif, 2014). If involvement of pupil voice does not occur then the process becomes one of teacher selection which may not engage the pupils (El Sherif, 2014). The desire and preference for choice in PE exhibited by the pupils in this study supports the findings of Smith et al (2009). With a similar sample size and age range in a different area of the country, they concluded that modernising, informalising and democratising the curriculum would have greater impact on participation in PE (ibid). Choice, including less traditional non-team sports, could enhance engagement and enjoyment for pupils and potentially lead to continuation post school (Trudeau and Shepard, 2008; Smith et al, 2009). Tammenlin et al (2003) found that engagement in a particular sport in adolescence made it more likely for a person to continue that sport in adulthood.

The pupils spoke of the process of PE and how they would like the curriculum delivered and that the nature of the classes can be detrimental (Portman, 1995a). The issue of structuring of lessons is particularly relevant as it tends to favour pupils in sports teams and not the less able (Prochaska et al, 2003). The pupils raised issues about the

competitiveness of PE and about the miss match in skills and atmosphere when sets are mixed. This suggests that PE in the schools follows a traditional competitive PE curriculum and process which is not meeting the needs of the spectrum of children participating. Allowing choice of how they undertake PE i.e., competitive or non-competitive, would be a cultural change which alongside choice of activity could increase participation for 'PE adverse' pupils (Brooks and Magnussun, 2006, p.872).

#### ***5.2.4 Gender and Choice***

There are a number of studies that suggest boys like more challenging activities and team games and girls prefer more aesthetic activities (Birtwistle and Brodie, 1991; Folsom-Meek, 1992; Subramanian and Silverman, 2007) and there was an element of this found in the study with some girls wanting the choice of dance on the curriculum and with a number of boys being content with the traditional sporting games of rugby and football. In the interviews, boys such as Charles (SS) and Luke (IS), talked about their enjoyment of competition and the feeling which it gave them. However, this study found that choice is far more complex and subtle than a gender differentiation. Ann (SS) expressed her enjoyment of competition with as much passion as any of the boys. Thus, while some girls wished for the opportunity to choose non-competitive sports as suggested in Smith et al (2009), others enjoyed such a challenge. Equally, a number of boys deemed competition as a big problem in PE and something that affected their participation, performance and led to disillusionment. Thus, a non-competitive option would be welcomed by both genders. Schools offering such a choice can allow pupils to avoid competition (El Sherif, 2014) and would have a positive impact on self-esteem and confidence (Smith et al, 2009). Although some pupils did exhibit influences of cultural stereotypes there are differences within gender (Hay and MacDonald, 2010a). Many pupils had views which broke down gender stereotyping with Elaine (SS) expressing a desire to play team sport such as football and Frank (IS) speaking fondly of his leisure activity of dance and yet he was someone who would have opted out of school PE if he had the chance. Thus, the issue seems to lie more in the range of tastes pupils have when they undertake physical activity, what they feel good at and this tends to be related to their ability in a sport/activity or their experience when playing it. Frank (IS) was obviously self-motivated to take part in dance outside of school and so presumably would be self-motivated to take part if it had been offered in school. Having an activity pupils enjoy leads to self-motivation (Brooks and Magnussen, 2006) and this would help to make choice in PE work (Lonsdale et al, 2009).

Image did play a role alongside societal cultural norms as some girls did not want to take part in swimming so they would not get their hair wet as Karen (SS) alluded to, with other girls feeling football was a boy's sport as mentioned by Elaine (SS). This supports findings from Shropshire et al (1997) that girls are more likely to feel embarrassed playing sport. It may also be that sport does not fit in with their perceived image and they may not have enough time to change or do not want to be sweaty for the rest of the day (Couturier et al, 2005). However, there was also a

perception from the questionnaire and Elaine (SS) that participation in sport is good for weight loss and that was potentially seen as positive for image.

There is also evidence that limitation of opportunity is placed upon pupils due to their gender and ability. For gender, not a single boy was offered the chance to play netball in school despite it being a mainstream sport. This does seem a blatant limitation on opportunity due to gender. Although this is a direct bias of the school not offering the sport to boys, its roots are firmly in the socio-cultural stereotyping of traditional male and female sports. To some extent that has been broken down for females in areas such as football, rugby and cricket at a socio-cultural level. However, the girls in these findings suggest that it still pervades at a local level in schools. Schools can still limit opportunities for girls which if they had been given the choice, they could have then enjoyed the sport and maybe even have joined a club after school (Guardian, 2017). Smith et al (2009) found that choice restrictions were felt particularly by girls. This study found such limitations were vocalised more by girls than boys in the interviews or comments in the questionnaire. The study by Smith et al (2009) only used one mechanism for data collection, that of focus groups. This study used a triangulated approach, and it was the questionnaire survey which through its quantitative data collection exposed the range of sports to be less for boys than girls (see Chapter 6). Although girls were more likely to talk about the choice restriction they faced, the cultural parameters of masculinity possibly made it less likely for boys to speak of a desire to undertake a traditional female sport and instead just raised the issue of ridicule if an attempt was made to cross such a boundary. Many Boys can tend to discriminate against other boys (Skille and Waddington, 2006) and this aides and abets cultural stereotyping and plays a role in limiting choice in PE.

### ***5.2.5 Social Field Theory and Choice***

At the conceptual level the feelings, experiences and opinions of the pupils are reflected in social field theory. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed social field theory as a conceptual framework for relationships between human beings in a particular setting (or field). This field theory has been applied to PE in schools in terms of the recognition and understanding of the constituents of ability (Evans, 2004; Hay 2005; Hay and Macdonald, 2010b; Wilkinson et al, 2013). However, a number of the experiences of the pupils can be interpreted using this conceptual framework in a wider sphere than ability alone. There is an awareness of the powerful agents in the field (Bourdieu, 1986; 1990) whom in general tend to be the teachers but can also be the most able pupils. The pupils rationalise their situation with an acceptance that the teachers decide, and pupil voice is not taken into account, as the teachers set the rules being the most powerful players. They reproduce past structures which advantage pupils of a similar habitus and capital and maintain the status quo (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Sullivan, 2002; Smith 2020).

This power is reinforced by some whom described compulsion and coercion when they talk about undertaking PE. They feel a helplessness in this field which can be reinforced by other powerful agents such as the high ability pupils. They seem to have more influence over the teachers than the less able which corresponds to them being more likely to think they have choice and that school teams are picked in a fair manner. Habitus may be a factor with PE teachers viewing these pupils as reflecting their ideals and values regarding PE. Habitus is described as the disposition of a person which is evidenced by attitudes, beliefs, ideals etc. (Bourdieu, 1977b;1987;1990;1994; Reay, 2015). The said disposition is socially constructed through upbringing, identity, social standing, social interactions and experiences (Bourdieu, 1984; Hay, 2005; Reay, 2015). Thus, high ability pupils may have more influence upon teachers to decide what they do than the less able as they are more likely to embody such habitus that reflects that of the PE teachers. High ability pupils may also exhibit capital that is more recognisable or can be traded to have more influence with PE teachers and hence have better access to choice, sway collective choice in PE, and be selected for school teams. Bourdieu (1986) contends there are three forms of capital: social, cultural and economic. Such capital can be used to obtain, invest and trade (Bourdieu 1986; Redelius and Hay, 2009; Smith 2020). Abundance of such capital in a social network can lead to more power and influence in the field. Bourdieu (1986) classes physical capital under cultural capital and this embodiment can be influential in PE (Evans, 2004). Conversely, pupils without such capital can be marginalised as not being worth the effort (Wilkinson et al, 2013) thus being given ‘consolation’ activities to partake in. However, some high ability may feel their habitus and capital as a straitjacket as they have to conform to expectation which may be, for example in the independent school, to play rugby every week as they are a member of the team, rather than play another sport. Thus, although habitus and capital is seen by many studies as working in favour of pupils deemed high ability and against those deemed low ability (Evans, 2004; Hay 2005; Hay and McDonald 2010b; Wilkinson et al, 2013) and it has also been seen in this study, it can also work against the high ability group. Although it seemed apparent on the surface that the higher ability pupils in the independent school had a form of choice and the lower ability did not, in practice the reality of the situation was that both groups had a pre-ordained pathway.

This second group of powerful agents (high ability pupils) may not view their lower ability counterparts of reflecting their habitus ideals and not having much capital to trade and this may lead to a less favourable environment for them if playing sport together. Resulting in lesser ability pupils not being involved as much in the game or being told off or ridiculed for making mistakes (Hay and Isahunter, 2006; Hay and McDonald, 2010b). This study suggests that the feeling from both groups is that development is better through separation as many pupils wanted the choice to engage in PE in their own ability set. An ability set or streaming can be common in secondary schools for academic subjects (Wilkinson and Penny, 2014). It is the process of putting children in a class which reflects a more homogeneous attainment in the subject across the group. Setting involves grouping pupils on ability for specific

subjects but not across the whole curriculum whereas streaming involves grouping pupils on ability for the whole curriculum and they are in the same group for all subjects (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018). Many teachers feel that there is an educational developmental benefit across the ability range if children are set on ability groupings (Reay, 1998; Hallam and Ireson, 2003; Hallam et al, 2008; Wilkinson and Penny 2014) and this approach can be advocated as a method to raise standards (Hallinan and Sorensen, 1987; Cahan et al. 1996; Chisaka 2002; DfES, 2005). However, many studies have indicated that setting on ability does not enhance achievement (Slavin, 1990; Kulik and Kulik, 1992; Reay, 1998; William and Bartholomew, 2004; Ireson et al, 2005). Studies do not tend to ask pupil opinions on their preferences for setting and neither did this study directly. It was not apparent in the initial brief literature review and thus was not used to stimulate discussion in the focus group. It is a cross theme issue that has emerged as the study branched into more breadth and then depth. Although it was raised by pupils in relation to choice as a preference for the process of PE, it also features significantly in the themes of development and ability, pressure, participation and health where it is discussed in more depth.

The bridge between choice for lower and higher ability pupils was seen in the context of effort by some pupils. One interview (James, IS) spoke of if lower ability pupils wanted to join the higher ability they had to work hard. This is interesting as effort and work rate can be seen as constituent factors of ability by PE teachers (Wilkinson et al, 2013). Thus, this seems to be transmitted from the most powerful agents to the next most powerful and as a result their definition of ability in the field aligns with the most powerful agents.

Social and cultural capital seem to manifest when pupils are given a form of choice. This choice is that of the collective so the more influential members of the group can ally to get their preference of sport. Alternatively, social capital can cause a group norm to work against a choice of sport as one female remarked regarding girls not wanting to do swimming due to not wanting to get wet hair and another remarked at wanting to partake in football but other girls prohibiting participation on grounds it was a boy's sport. This gender stereotype is also seen by not giving boys the choice of netball or dance as they are not seen as a boys' sports and that would be to the detriment of the social capital of any boy participating (Skille and Waddington, 2006). This detriment was seen by pupils as a bigger consequence to boys than it was to girls.

A cultural shift in such a field is particularly difficult when there is no change in habitus, no gain in social capital and the powerful agents are keeping the status quo. Such powerful agents preserve the structure including pedagogy and curriculum as it actualises opportunity, benefits and privilege for those with the dominant habitus and capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Bourdieu, 1996; Grenfell 2006; Bathmaker 2015). Pupil voice can influence and lead

to change but only if the powerful agents allow, as any battle would only have one outcome due to power imbalance. Although, pupils did show aspects of autonomous states with their desire to be able to choose and an indication that they understood their own development. Even when they felt a teacher gave them a choice like Miss X, it was her benevolence rather than their autonomy, which does not threaten the existing structures (Bourdieu, 1991; Sullivan, 2002; Bathmaker, 2015). However, the gap between adults and children in society in terms of power and distance are not as great as they once were (Wouters, 1987; van Krieken, 1998; Kilminster, 1998; Elias, 2000). This could be an indicator of why children especially those at the older end of the spectrum do feel they should have more rights in decisions affecting themselves, in this case PE. Many schools may feel it is difficult to shift away from their existing model as it would have implications for behaviour and discipline. However, such expectations and demands of pupils are growing and this could lead to behaviour problems if not met (Green, 2003). Therefore, the powerful agents of field theory (teachers) could allow choice to be something that can be influenced by pupil voice, but it still can only be given by authority figures in the school. Such figures will only allow choice if they perceive a benefit from the outcome whether it be internal or external to the school.

However, the same powerful agents (teachers) operate in other fields within the school such as pupil experience and health and fitness. In these fields, choice may be deemed a more important commodity as it could lead to goals of happier more content pupils and present less behavioural issues and this could steer towards a possibility of lifelong participation.

The pupil voice of wanting a choice will not be sufficient in isolation unless the power differential continues to narrow. External priorities can change so pupil choice could also rely on the authority figures above the teachers who are even more powerful agents such as Ofsted or DfE placing greater emphasis on pupil decision making or even society making cultural shifts.

# Chapter 6. Theme: Participation

‘it runs our school pretty much, PE.’ (James, IS)

## 6.1 Findings: Participation

Participation emerged as a theme in the focus groups and was extended and reinforced through the survey and interviews.

### 6.1.1 Reasons for Enjoying PE Participation

In the focus group the main motivation cited for participating in physical activity was enjoyment. In school, of course, PE is compulsory but outside of school it is voluntary. In the questionnaire, 64.9% (n=100) of pupils said they enjoyed PE with 16.8% (n=26) neither enjoying nor not enjoying and 16.8% (n=26) not enjoying PE. Boys were more likely to say they enjoyed PE/sport, 70.9% as opposed to 55.1% for girls, which is quite a considerable gap. The main reasons cited by pupils for enjoying participation in PE were having fun, social interaction or variety of activity, as well as health and skill development (see Table 6).

Reasons for Enjoyment of Participation in PE	Number of Pupils (n)
Fun	59
Physical and mental health	14
Variety	12
Ability and skill development	11
Social	8

Table 6: The main reasons were for participation in PE

A number of pupils cited that enjoyment of PE was key to participation with comments such as *‘it’s fun and enjoyable’* and *‘because it can be really fun, and I learn a lot of new things’*. There was also a feeling that the social side of PE and relationship building enhanced enjoyment with pupils remarking that PE was, *‘very fun and a good way to build relationships and teamwork,’* and *‘I like playing sport with friends’*. However, it was not just friends that enhance the social side, it could be the teacher and meeting people from other classes with comments such as, *‘I like the teacher, the sport we do as a class and the people in the class’*, and *‘I prefer academic sides of school however I do enjoy it as it is a social activity and is nice to mix with people who are not in my lessons’*.

There was also an appreciation that it was a different type of lesson with one pupil stating, *‘PE is a very enjoyable lesson, you are always doing something different whether that is practically or in a theory lesson, it’s really fun to do and it’s just a break from doing a boring lesson’*.



Some pupils showed a heartfelt connection with PE and the fact that it gives them opportunities that they would not normally get citing, *'because I like doing sport and it is the main thing I do in my life'*, and *'you have a chance to do different sports that you wouldn't normally do'*.

The fact that PE is good for fitness was also mentioned, *'PE is good, and it allows me to do exercise and keep fit'* and the link to controlling weight was also mentioned, *'because it's to burn off some weight...'*. Support for mental health was alluded to as well with statements such as, *'It's fun and makes people happy'*.

Ability was also cited as a reason why some pupils enjoyed PE with 81% of those identifying as high ability saying that they enjoyed PE compared with 0% of those identifying as lesser ability. Some of the reasons for the higher ability enjoying PE were because this was their time to shine observing, *'Sport is my strong point'* and *'I am sporty so my ability for PE is better than others'*. Some liked PE, *'because of the competition aspect'* and others linked enjoyment to outside participation, *'because I play football outside of school and I am a sporty person'*. Thus, it appears that a number of children do enjoy the visibility of PE as it aids and builds their self- esteem.

The interviews reinforced many of the reasons for participating in PE/sport. When asked about the positives of participation (Oscar, IS) spoke of, *'Obviously, playing in team sports with your mates, having good fun'*.

Frank (IS) highlighted all the main reasons for participation when speaking of dance outside of school:

*'I've always been interested in it, from a young age. I just carried it through, because I enjoy it. I find that there's not as much pressure as there is on sports. I think people overlook the fact that there're alternatives to rugby. I think body image has a lot to do with it. Like, people will think, "The only way I'm going to get fitter is by doing hard sports like rugby," when in reality, you just have to eat well, drink, do all of this, and you can also get that by doing any other sport like dance or football. It's exactly the same.'*

This is quite a perceptive insight into PE, which encapsulates that enjoyment is crucial to participation in PE and the same health benefits can be reaped, regardless of activity.

Repeatedly enjoyment and the type of sport undertaken appear as crucial factors in how pupils viewed participation:

*'I really like PE, but it depends what we're doing. So, if it's football or something, I feel like that's a little bit more boring. Where, if it's like volleyball or the gym, I really enjoy it because I feel like it's a good time to interact with your friends, as well.'* (Karen, SS).

Whom they undertook PE with was also important with Karen (SS) alluding to friends and Edward (SS), who openly discussed that PE should be banned in schools, admitting, *'I'd probably enjoy being in an environment with my friends, just kind of... I don't know, play some football or something'*.

A number of pupils felt they were good at PE and it gave them enjoyment and self-esteem as it was their ‘*time to shine*’:

*‘I think because I’m fairly good at sport, so as long as I’ve been playing sport, it’s been enjoyable because I’ve been able to succeed and do well.’* (Luke, IS).

James (IS) viewed PE in quite an emotive way:

*‘It’s my hobby. It’s my passion really. It’s the thing I look forward to most in the week, knowing I’ve got three or four sporting matches fixed each week in various different sports at school.’*

This indicates that PE participation has an appreciable positive impact on his school experience.

### **6.1.2 Reasons for Not Enjoying PE Participation**

When analysing comments from pupils whom either stated they did not enjoy PE or neither enjoyed nor not enjoyed it, pressure and lack of choice were the main reasons why pupils did not like PE (see Table 7). These themes are covered in greater depth in Chapters 5 and 9.

<b>Reasons for not enjoying participation in PE</b>	<b>Number of Pupils (n)</b>
Lack of Choice	11
Pressure	10
Outside in the cold	5
Ability and non-academic	4

Table 7: The main reasons for not enjoying participation in PE

Regarding choice in PE, one pupil mentioned, ‘*Not much variety, like school just has too much cross country and rugby*’ and another stated ‘*it depends on what it is, where it is and when it is*’. Therefore, choice could lead to enjoyment which leads to participation.

Pressure and judgement by pupils and teachers alike did have negative connotations on enjoyment. This can be seen in some of their comments about teachers including:

*‘because I’m not a very active person and teachers sometimes judge you in PE’* and *‘I feel like two of the girl teachers can have favourites in the class and I don’t enjoy being taught [sic] by them. They can come across like they are judging you and don’t like you to some people-also higher PE groups have got given better sports to do.’*

This latter quote indicates a perceived bias towards some pupils and some groups, which links to pressure and choice. This suggests that some pupils are judged less favourably adding pressure and some groups, such as high ability, are given more choice or variety, affecting participation.

Pressure could impact participation in other ways such as the fear of ridicule by peers being apparent, *'because I feel like people will make fun if I do something wrong'* and also discomfort, *'I feel pressured to do sports that I don't feel comfortable doing'*. This unease is possibly linked to the exposure felt by pupils in PE and/or to the competitive nature of PE with comments such as, *'I also feel that sport gets taken seriously all the time which I don't enjoy'*.

Another factor for disliking PE seemed to be the environment when it is cold outside with some pupils citing this as a reason for not enjoying PE. Pupils commented that, *'They make you go outside in the freezing cold'*, *'because it is bad, and we have to go outside when it is really cold and rainy'* and *'they put us outside in -20C temperatures. We freeze to death and get hypothermia'*. Although the last quote is probably an exaggeration it does make the point that PE tends to be an outdoor activity and there are times of the year that may make that an unpleasant experience and adversely affects participation.

Other reasons for not enjoying PE included ability, that it is not academic, and they are not taking it for GCSE with statements such as, *'Doesn't affect my GCSEs it's a waste of my time'*, *'it is a waste of time, I would rather do other lessons'* and *'because I am not very sporty and find it very hard'*.

The interviews reinforced many of the reasons for not participating in PE/sport.

Some pupils raised the issue about competition spoiling their enjoyment and hence affecting their participation in PE:

*'I'd make it non-competitive or, like, if you go into something, I'd make sure people knew what they were signing up for. One of the phrases my family uses is 'nothing is fun anymore', and I definitely agree with that.'* Frank (IS).

The lack of choice was a factor for Michael (IS) not enjoying PE, *'because of the way everybody was forced to do rugby. As a result, I've really grown to despise it because I was forced to do all these different things that I didn't really want to do'*.

However, Michael did allude to an approach when he did get self-esteem from PE and this related to a particular sport and whom he did it with:

*'Having dyspraxia obviously makes a bit of an issue but in basketball, somehow I'm picked first every time, which I don't quite get. Granted I'm in a hall with all the other people that are not very good with sports, but I can get a shot in basketball.'*

Consequently, by participating with pupils who he identified as being his level and a sport he felt more able in, he played more of a role in the game.

Elaine (SS) also spoke about her enjoyment and participation in PE fading because of whom she undertook PE with:

*‘For the first year, I did [enjoy PE]. I was part of the football team. I was part of netball. A couple of other things, as well. I did enjoy my PE lessons, I was always there on time, getting changed, doing them as best I could. Then, as the years went on I, kind of, stopped doing it as much because I didn’t feel, sort of... because of the people who did it, like, the students who did it, I didn’t get along with, so it put me off joining the teams, and stuff. It’s still like that now. Like, I’d love to do some of the things now, but I don’t like the people who do it. It shouldn’t really put me off, but it does.’*

Therefore, for some pupils, enjoyment, which drives participation, can depend as much (if not more) on who you participate with than what you are actually undertaking.

Frank (IS) spoke of having a more individual and differentiated approach to PE:

*‘So, I’d make everything a bit more fun. Yes. Especially, I’d get to know the needs of the pupils who are doing it. For example, if one has got a disability, or if one is not very good, or if they’re in Year 11 and time is better off revising, I’d definitely make those changes, providing there’s a positive outcome.’*

Although most of his approach refers to participation the last part implies that in some circumstances, other things (such as GCSEs) are more important than PE and therefore choice should be broader than activity to encompass not participating at all.

Michael (IS) felt the approach in PE was not individual and he felt his needs were not taken into account which were quite demotivating:

*‘Whereas in school, because it’s much more generalised, it’s one size fits all. If you’re not good at this then you might not go far or you might not be able to. For instance, for the rugby team wise, because I wasn’t ever good at rugby because I can’t even catch a ball, I automatically got put in the D team and often ended up not playing anything, so I wasn’t then involved.’*

This suggests that ability of a pupil can actually limit their participation, with less able being overlooked to the extent of not being involved.

The school ethos of the independent school has sport as a key pillar with James (IS) pointing out:

*‘It runs our school pretty much, PE. Like virtually everyone in the year’s favourite lesson probably is PE. Everyone is in a sports team. I don’t think there’s anyone that’s never played a sport team this year. It’s a sport school.’*

Thus, there is a driver from the school to participate in sport and this may enhance participation opportunities but equally could marginalise those pupils deemed as ‘non-sporty’.

In the state school, two of the three girls interviewed talked about teachers showing favouritism which affected their perception of themselves and PE. Elaine (SS) who demonstrated a willingness to participate was put off engagement due to her perception of favouritism:

*'There's been, in a sense, favouritism. I'm not in the school dance team anymore because I didn't feel comfortable with the teacher who ran it, because she didn't seem to be fair towards me. There was no point me, sort of, being in the team if she wasn't going to be fair towards me.'*

Karen (SS) also felt favouritism occurred which affected her participation stating:

*[Sports Teams] 'I feel like it's favouritised (sic). So, the girls' netball team, I feel like when they're in PE, they get more advice, or they get treated nicer than people who aren't necessarily in one of the school's teams. You could trial, but I don't know if you would because it... I think the PE teachers, as well, would ask the girls if they wanted somebody else in the team, and they wouldn't want the standards to drop off the team.'*

This also implied a power relationship between the established girls in the team and other girls in the class with the PE teacher distributing power to these girls.

### **6.1.3 Participation in a variety of PE activities/Sports**

The variety of sports and PE activities on offer to children in PE can vary and there still seems to be stereotypes when participating in PE. These tend to be reinforced on a gender basis and, to some degree, a social class basis when analysing school type.

*Netball*- only females participate in netball in PE lessons with zero male participation. It is quite an exhilarating sport and yet because it was traditionally deemed to be a female sport it still appears to be only offered to females with male participation seemingly facing a socio-cultural barrier.

*Gymnastics*- 57.1% of females but only 9.7% of males participate in gymnastics. Once again this was traditionally seen as a female sport and culturally that seems to remain the case.

*Dance* – very low participation rate which demonstrates a dearth of opportunities provided in PE. Nobody in the independent school participates which indicates it is not offered even though some of the pupils partake outside of school. In the state school it is female dominated 28.6% v1%. Once again stereotypes and social barriers seem to inhibit this activity.

*Football*- only 33.3% of females play football even though women's football has taken great strides in recent years. Thus, it is a surprise that there still appears to be socio-cultural barriers to participation in PE. It also seemed

apparent from the interviews and focus groups that more time was spent on football in the state school than the independent school.

*Rugby*- this sport seemed to have an even split of participation across the two schools and across both genders. Although traditionally it was seen as a sport for higher social class and participation outside of school favours the independent school, in PE there does seem to be opportunity for all with the exception of some less able pupils in the independent school. However, the amount of time with regard to participation was not indicated in the questionnaire, with focus groups and interviews alluding to far greater amounts of participation in the independent school.

*Cricket*- The independent school is more likely to engage in cricket than the state school. This could also be due to socio-cultural factors.

*Athletics, Swimming and Tennis*- these sports had even participation by both genders. This reflects how they are portrayed in society. Athletics (in the form of running) and swimming are sports that many people undertake for a pastime whether they are male or female. The Grand Slam tennis tournaments all have a male and female competition running at the same time. Thus, these sports have been established as equal gender participation over a long period of time and portrayed as such in the media.

The interviews illuminated some of the pupils' thoughts with regard to the stereotypes that appear in PE activity. Ann (SS) talked of the intrinsic stereotypes in the pupils:

*'Just I think it's like boys are usually stereotypically, like, to do with sport just because it's... you look at football and rugby and just think it's a boy's sport, so girls aren't really interested in it..'*

A number of reasons were suggested for the rationale behind why such issues exist in PE. Charles (SS) felt that it was to do with peer pressure and ridicule saying:

*'I think it's just down to people judging them. If it's traditionally a girls' sport, then people will see that and maybe have a laugh.'*

Equally he felt the same was true for girls, *'some girls don't do PE because they think their friends will judge them'*.

Karen (SS) also spoke of boys feeling it would undermine masculinity:

*'I feel like some boys would be like, "Oh, that's a girly sport. I don't want to do that," because they feel like they would look weak.'*

She also suggested that some boys could overcome this conceding:

*'Whereas, some boys would be like, "Oh, it's a change. Something new".'*

There was a sense of frustration exhibited by Elaine (SS) implying a hegemonic masculinity barrier to participation:

*'We've got a dance team at school, and there're no lads in that. That really frustrates me because it's, like... I know for a fact there're boys in this school who can dance, but they're just too afraid to show it, because people have this view that... If a boy was to get up and dance in assembly, he'd probably get made fun of.'*

Therefore, the pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes and the fear of ridicule prevent participation in certain PE activities.

The media in particular television was seen as a mechanism for creating and propagating stereotypes:

*'Mainly because when you watch it on TV, it's usually just boys. Like, football, you don't see women's football on TV or anything like that, so you just think that it's associated with boys'* (Ann, SS).

Karen (SS) concurred with this view of television:

*'I just feel like on the TV it's more renowned for a boy to play football than it is for a girl.'*

Therefore, socio-cultural issues in PE and the media can create and reinforce stereotypes in PE and do influence pupils. However, some pupils thought the issues surrounding gender and participation were more intrinsic. Karen (SS) felt:

*'I feel like it depends how- because I feel like some boys are more sportier than girls, mainly, but I feel like boys enjoy it more depending on what they're doing. So, boys don't like playing volleyball mostly, but if a boy was put on a field with football, that would be his kind of thing. Whereas, sometimes the girls like to dance and do more like.'*

Elaine (SS) also alluded to girls blocking a breakdown of barriers preventing other girls from participating:

*'I came to secondary, and I was really, really gutted that we didn't seem to do football in PE lessons. I was, like, "Well, I'm not the only one who wants to do football," but then all the other girls who didn't want to do it would be complaining. They're, like, "No, we can't do football. It's a boys' sport".'*

However, Elaine (SS) did not just hold the pupils to blame but also the school for backing down in the face of peer pressure from pupils:

*'I've mentioned before, in PE, when Football was supposed to be what we were doing, as in the girls, and we did for two lessons, or something, and because most of the girls were complaining, so dropped it and switched it for something else. I complained about that. I was, like, "Why did we have to do that because some of them didn't want to do that?" They were, like, "Well, they were complaining that it's a boys' sport." I'm like, "But you shouldn't let them do that".'*

This indicates a lack of leadership from PE staff to tackle such socio-cultural barriers.

There was a desire among some pupils that participation in sport should be equal. For instance, Robert (SS) felt:

*‘Yes, I think that boys should play netball. I think that girls should play football, which I don’t think they play, because obviously it’s just a sport really, isn’t it? It’s like netball’s just like basketball, so why shouldn’t we play it?’*

Elaine (SS) concurred with this sentiment:

*‘I’ve always had that kind of view, where I think sports should be open for everyone.’*

This lack of opportunity resounded with other pupils with Karen (SS) saying:

*‘I feel like everyone should do the same sports because although netball is mainly seen as a girls’ sport, some boys might enjoy it and don’t get the chance to participate in that, which I don’t think is fair.’*

Elaine (SS) saw it as a responsibility of the school to drive a change of hearts and minds:

*‘I just think that they [PE teachers] should make it more, sort of, acceptable. They should make it seem more acceptable to do these things. It’s almost as if they don’t dare, like, say... change the way everyone thinks.’*

**6.1.4 Participation in sport/physical exercise outside of school**

If pupils enjoy PE in school, they are more likely to participate in sport or physical exercise outside of school, with 85% of pupils who strongly like PE participating outside of school whereas, 61% of pupils who strongly dislike PE do not participate outside of school

This demonstrates how important it is for pupils to like PE if they are going to participate in physical activity outside of school. Thus, a positive and enjoyable experience of PE in the school setting could have an impact upon participation in the community.

Main Reasons for Participating in sport outside of school	Number of pupils (n)
Fun and Enjoyment	37
Social	16
Health/Stress and relaxation	11

Table 8: The main reasons for participating in sport outside of school

Similar to PE in schools, having fun, enjoying what you were doing, and the social aspect of sport were the main reasons that the pupils stated for involvement in sport outside of school (see Table 8) with examples cited as, *‘I am doing sports I like and socialising with others’* and *‘because I have made friends there and enjoy the sports in question’*. Some also appeared to be less pressured because it is not forced but a voluntary choice stating, *‘I enjoy it*



*because I don't feel forced to do something and I feel less pressured' and 'I feel less judged because we want to be there'.*

There was also a fitness and health element to undertaking sport outside of school with pupils stating, *'it helps you stay fit'*, and *'I enjoy playing football for many physical benefits'*. The issue of weight also arose with one pupil relating participation to weight loss, *'because I lose weight and feel better the next morning and in myself'*. This correlated to self-image and self-esteem and undertaking sport to feel better, but it does also allude to the socio-cultural stigma of weight (see Chapter 7).

There was an insight into coerced participation in sport outside of school such as, *'parents force me'* and the impact of facilitators, *'my coach isn't nice'*, although, such comments were not common.

The interviews reflected reasons for participation, and they reinforced the importance of enjoyment and friendships as the main drivers for participation in sport outside of school. It was the key reason to Ann (SS):

*'If you know that your friend is going to club, it's the pushing point for you wanting to go. Like, you might like the sport, but, sometimes, if you were there by yourself, you wouldn't enjoy it as much as if you were with your friends. So, it's part of the experience'.*

The opportunity to have fun with friends and freedom to be competitive or not was important to Edward (SS):

*'[Cycling] ...obviously there was a competitive side, but we used to just as mates. There used to be a quarry at the back of the village, and we used to just race around the paths back there, and just as kind of a village bit of fun really. Obviously, there were the competitive people and just the people who did it for fun. There was nothing preventing anyone from doing anything. You just could.'*

However, Charles (SS) took part because of the competition, *'I like competing. There was a swimming gala last night and I just enjoy competing'*.

Michael (IS) participated in sport outside of school as it could be individualised to his needs:

*'Generally, outside of the school it can be tailored because for me, I have dyspraxia, which is hand-eye coordination difficulties. As a result, if I'm outside of school and I've got one to one lessons, they can tailor that because of my dyspraxia. They can tailor it to work on specific things.'*

Once again similar to PE in school, the most common reason cited for non-involvement was no interest or disliking sport (see Table 9) such as, *'I don't find anything that interests me'* and *'I hate sport and sport related activities'*.

The main reasons for not participating in sport outside of school	Number of Pupils (n)
Dislike/no interest	21
No time/other things to do	16
Previously participated	6
Academic study	6

Table 9: The main reasons for not participating in sport outside of school

One pupil felt they did not enjoy anything in PE, yet they walked a lot but did not consider that to fit the PE definition stating, *'I do a lot of walking and just never found anything in PE I enjoy'*. This suggests a narrower definition of what is considered as PE activity which may be reinforced in pupils' minds due to their school's curriculum in PE.

A number of children felt they did not have the time to participate for various reasons including some **key** responsibilities such as, *'I don't have time, I am a young carer'* and also family interests, *'I don't have time as I'm very busy with family'*. Other reasons could range from academic work to leisure activities for instance *'because I do revision and play on xbox'*.

Some children previously played sport outside of school but stopped, for a range of reasons. One of the main reasons was lost of interest, *'I used to participate in table tennis at the King's centre for 2 years, but it became boring'*. Loss of interest could also be caused by saturation, *'I participated in football for 4 times a week for 5 years, but it got boring, so I quit'*. There was an indication of a lack of equality and inclusion in club sport demotivating children and leading to non-participation with one pupil citing, *'I did participate in sport which was a football team but wasn't getting fair game time as others did'*.

Not actually being given game time could make the sportiest of children give up a sport:

*'I play at my local rugby club. In the cricket season I'll play at my local cricket club. But the football season sort of links with the rugby season, so they combine. I did football for three years, and I stopped that this year. I stopped my football because I was part of quite a big team, and there is only one team playing on a day, and so often would just not get a play time, so I thought I'd play rugby instead (Gary, IS).*

The demands of the education system itself could prevent pupils from taking part in sport outside of school as academic study was also a factor with pupils saying, *'never have time due to revising and getting homework done'* and *'I have better things to do like revise for the GCSEs I'm going to need'*.

The commitment and intensity that is sometimes required in outside sports could also become a barrier to participation. Frank (IS) spoke of his experiences of swimming:

*'So, yes, outside of school I did swimming for about, I'd say, four years with, like, the city team. It was very intense, very, sort of... You have to be there every week. You have to be there on time. You have to do this, like, really quite... not harsh but very... I don't know the word to describe it. Maybe it is a bit harsh. It was just quite scary, and it just, sort of, put me off it.'*

The cost of outside activities could also mean outside participation was prohibitive as one pupil stated, *'too much money'*. This inhibitor of money for children who wanted to participate was also broached in the interviews, with Elaine (SS) stating:

*'I do dance outside of school now. I've done that since I was five, as well as- I used to do netball and badminton, but I dropped them because of money issues. I still do dance, and that's something I really enjoy.'*

However, she was not the only interviewee to mention the barrier of money, Michael (IS) spoke of:

*'...these lessons have to be paid for and stuff like that. As long as you're rich, you're fine but if you've not got enough money then it's even less accessible.'*

It was an issue mentioned by 7 of the 12 interviewees with a mix across both schools.

Although lack of enjoyment of sport is the major barrier, it is not the only issue preventing participation outside of school. Creating time appears to be an issue with competing demands of family activity, leisure time or the pressure of academic study. The environment in sports outside school is also put under the spotlight with indications that children are not treated fairly, even if they pay. Not being allowed to play the sport in the sport club seems self-defeating and is concerned with adult voice which controls the environment. The barrier of finance is also prevalent with the majority of interviewees raising it as an issue.

### **6.1.5 Gender and participation in PE/sport outside of school**

It seems apparent that more males participate in sport outside school than females although it was not a large discrepancy (see Table 10).

<b>Participation in Sport outside of school</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Males	57.0% (n=60)
Females	49.0% (n=24)

Table 10: participation of males and females in sport outside of school

In general, just under half of males and just over half of females do not do any sport outside of school. In many respects this quite a large number of pupils voluntarily participating in some form of PE/sport. The differential

between male and female is 8% and is possibly accounted for by opportunities available in the community (see section 6.1.8).

Stereotypes were also raised as a barrier to participation outside of school. Elaine (SS) stated about the image of girls and boys and sport:

*'Not stereotypically saying, like, girls are more lazy, but obviously it's seen as, like, girls will sit in, maybe do their makeup, go out with their friends or have a sleepover, whereas the boys might be, like, "Oh, fancy coming to do some football this weekend?" Stuff like that. It's, sort of, seen as that way.'*

However, Ann (SS) saw portrayal of sports in the media as more of the issue:

*'Mainly because when you watch it on TV, it's usually just boys. Like, football, you don't see women's football on TV or anything like that, so you just think that it's associated with boys. You don't see it, so people just don't think about it.'*

#### **6.1.6 Ability and participation in PE/sport outside of school**

Pupils who identified as higher ability were more likely to take part in sport outside of school at 65% rising to 80.6% when isolating those who strongly agreed that their ability was good. In contrast only 35% of those who identified as lower ability participated outside of school and when isolating those who strongly disagreed that their ability was good, this fell to 0% (see Chapter 8).

There could be also the perception that to be part of a club you had to be good at a sport to participate, Ann (SS) felt, *'Maybe if they didn't feel they were good enough, they might not want to go...'*

In contrast Charles (SS) cited that you could participate in swimming no matter what ability:

*'In swimming, obviously there are some that can't swim, and then there are the people that are really good at swimming. So, they split the pool up into three lanes; a teacher will stay with the pupil that can't swim and just guide them on.'*

#### **6.1.7 School Type and participation in PE/sport outside of school**

The independent school pupils were more likely to participate in sport outside of school, 95.7% compared with 53.5% in the state school. This could be influenced by the factors that the independent school does have a prowess for sport and as a result it may attract more sport orientated pupils who would undertake sport outside of school, as

James (IS) observed, *‘It’s a sport school’*. It could also be parental influence or financial factors or opportunities and links between the school and local sports clubs.

**6.1.8 Sports/PE activities participated in outside of school**

Pupils in the main participated in traditional community sports/PE activities (see Figure 11).

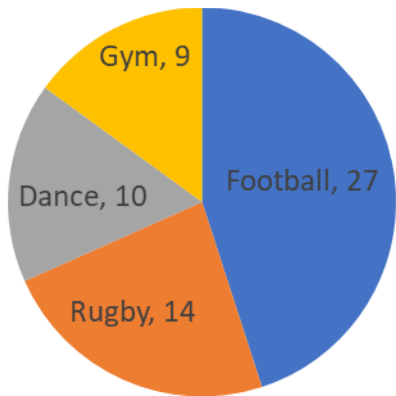


Figure 11: The main sports participated in outside of school

The sport participated in most outside of school in the independent sector was rugby and in the state school it was football. They are popular sports in the UK and have a good infrastructure at grassroots level which may aid opportunity for participation. However, this split seems to reinforce the sport of choice on a social class basis. Another element could be to do with the links to rugby clubs that were apparent in the independent school but not in the state school. This school link providing outside opportunities seems an important factor, with Oscar (IS) mentioning that, *‘I often train at [Professional Rugby Club] Stadium with the rugby’*. Although netball was not one of the main activities participated in outside of school, the connection with the state school seemed a critical link with Ann (SS) revealing that, *‘... netball, I got asked to do that through school, so that gave me the opportunity to join that club.’*

Dance featured highly outside school, yet it hardly ever features in school PE. Thus, a sport/activity does not necessarily have to be played in school for someone to participate outside. Once again dance has an infrastructure at grass roots level and like football and rugby it may be more accessible within the community.

The Gym was the other most cited after school PE pastime. Many communities now have a gym as it fits the modern culture of keeping fit. Interestingly, a number of pupils stated that they go to the gym to lose weight. This was in both genders, so exercise and weight were quite entangled for some pupils and the drive to lose weight was the main

factor to take part in exercise. This once again alludes to the stigma of weight in society which can be felt more acutely by young people deemed overweight in the school environment (see Chapter 7).

The common link between these physical activities is the grassroots infrastructure and availability in the community, which presents more readily the opportunity to participate. Many of the pupils participate in a range of sports. Robert (SS) reported, *‘I swim and I play football outside of school’* which was a similar combination to Charles (SS). Ann (SS) had a busy out of school schedule:

*‘I do netball three times a week, matches and training. Then, I do dance on Saturdays. Dance, because I’ve done it at a young age, so I just don’t want to give it up, but I do enjoy it.’*

### 6.1.9 Comparison with PE in Primary School

The pupils of the independent school were more likely to have enjoyed PE in primary school than those in the state school (see Table 11).

School	Enjoyment of PE in Primary School (%)
Independent School	87% (n=20)
State School	61% (n=80)

Table 11: Enjoyment of PE in Primary School

One explanation could be that this independent school has a reputation for sport and thus may attract more children (from families already committed to private education) who enjoy and/or are good at sport. Certainty in one case, this was the reason for the choice of school, *‘wider range of sports to do and a higher standard, that’s the reason why I moved to [Independent] school’*.

It seems apparent that pupils were more likely to enjoy PE in primary school if they still enjoy it in secondary school. 16 pupils who strongly agreed that they enjoyed PE in primary do not enjoy it now while 21 pupils who did not enjoy PE in primary do enjoy it now. Thus, enjoyment of PE is not a fixed state and there can flux between the two positions.

There is no discernible effect with regard to gender for enjoying PE in primary school. Analysing the data for the state school 61.2% of males and 61.3% of females enjoyed PE in primary with 20.4% of females and 27.6% of males not enjoying PE in primary.

Pupils who felt they were of a higher ability in PE were more likely to state that they enjoyed PE in primary school compared to pupils who felt they were of lower ability (70.9% v 28.5%). Thus, it could be that if enjoyment of PE is not experienced at an early age, then this can affect development and later participation.

The main positive aspects of PE in primary schools	Number of Pupils (n)
Primary more fun/better	31
Primary less pressure and less competitive	14
Not as hard as secondary PE	10

Table 12: The main positive aspects of PE in primary school

The main positive aspects of PE in secondary school	Number of Pupils (n)
Secondary has more sports and is less basic	25
Secondary more challenging and organised	9
Secondary has specialist staff and facilities	9

Table 13: The main positive aspects of PE in secondary school

Positive aspects mentioned of PE in primary school (see Table 12) included it was more fun such as, *‘most activities in primary school were fun and weren’t just sports’*. Many cited less pressure in primary, *‘there wasn’t as much pressure and competition’* and not being as robustly competitive, *‘people weren’t rough when they got competitive’*. The fear of ridicule and shouting were also reasons why PE in primary was better with examples given as, *‘in primary school PE was more engaging and people would compliment you rather than humiliate you if you failed’* and *‘(in secondary) you get shouted at when you didn’t do anything’*. Image was also mentioned as a factor of why primary PE was better, *‘in primary school the trainers you wore didn’t matter’* and *‘the people have changed and everyone cares how they look’*. Therefore, it appears image can be an added pressure on participation in PE and be part of the forced exposure either trying to be visible *‘with your new trainers’* or invisible without them. It seems apparent that for some pupils, fun wanes in secondary PE as it becomes more serious and competitive which can be exhibited by it becoming on one level less complimentary and supportive than in primary, resulting in a drop in enjoyment and potential humiliation.

It could be that some pupils who thrive in primary PE do not seem to excel as much in the new secondary PE environment and this acts as a demotivator. One particular explanation on what has changed since primary school was quite illuminating, *‘In primary I was in every sports team and now I’m not in one. I feel like I would be judged for joining by some people and in primary it was just more enjoyable’*.

However, there are some examples where pupils did perceive an improvement in their experience of PE in secondary school (see Table 13). One reason cited is in terms of specialist staff, *‘the staff has changed which has made a massive impact on how I approach team sports for the better’*. Other reasons for preferring secondary school PE include their own development, *‘I have developed at sport and I never used to play sport for fun or be athletic’* and the variety of sports undertaken, *‘you have a variety of sports and activities in secondary’*.

Thus, the experience for some pupils is they have thrived and enjoyed PE in secondary more than they did in primary. It could be because of the engagement with new facilities, new sports, specialist staff, the ethos of the school or even they have just a developed interest in the subject.

The interviews followed in a similar vein with many saying that PE was more enjoyable in primary school. Friends and activities were important in primary according to Karen (SS):

*'I feel like when I was younger it was more enjoyable because it was kind of, I suppose, just running about with my friends. It wasn't as such... doing a sport.'*

The fun aspect and less formal nature were cited by Edward (SS) as positives in primary:

*'I preferred primary school. It was a lot easier. It was a lot more fun. They were more interactive games. It was more like working with other people. It wasn't as quite regimented and as appealing to more sporty people as it is to the less athletic.'*

This inclusivity was also mentioned by Edward (SS) when comparing with secondary, *'Yes, a lot more inclusive in primary school.'* Ann (SS) saw another benefit of primary PE being that boys and girls participated together, *'[Primary] Yes. I enjoyed it then mainly because the classes were mixed, so you were with boys as well. So, there's, like, more competition.'*

However, Edward (SS) did not like such competition, and this is another reason why he preferred primary:

*'[Competitive Nature] A lot less than it is in secondary. Everybody was friends in primary, compared to now when we're all kind of against each other, because there's a lot more hormones involved and people just want to better than everyone else.'*

In contrast Charles (SS) preferred PE in secondary because of the competitive aspect:

*'I don't think it was quite as good in primary because, obviously, there weren't as many competitions and stuff, but it was still the lesson that I looked forward to in school.'*

Elaine (SS) spoke of being very sport orientated in primary and hoping to continue that into secondary:

*'Well, in primary I was very sport orientated. I used to be in the tennis team, the football team. I used to do a lot for the school. I used to really enjoy it. PE lessons were always, like, my favourite. Originally, this school was, obviously, xxxxxx Academy of Sport, so from a young age my mum was, like, "Oh, well, we want to get them going there, because of this, that and the other," different reasons, but I came here with the attitude, like, "I want to be involved with as much sport as I can." When I came, I was, like, "Oh, there's a lot going on. There's a lot I can take part in.'*



However, she does feel she is not as involved now but would like to be. She did also allude to different reasons, such as weight, for taking part now compared with past:

*‘Well, to be fair- I think, because I was more involved in primary, I do look back at it and be, like, “I wish I could be as involved as I was in primary,” but I do think I enjoy it more because there’s a lot more fact- like, I think more about it. When I do it now it’s, like, “Oh, well, if I do this for so long, maybe it can benefit my weight,” or, “It can benefit fitness. It can benefit this, that and the other,” whereas primary, it was just, like, “Oh, this is a bit of fun.”*

In the main, fun seems to be once again the key enabler for participation in primary school with any actual of perceived departure from that in secondary school being associated as adverse for some pupils.

### **6.1.10 Continued Participation in PE after leaving School**

Those pupils who strongly enjoy PE are more likely to continue PE after school than those who do not enjoy PE. The two ends of the spectrum ‘strongly agree’ and ‘strongly disagree’ to enjoy PE were far more likely and less likely to continue physical activity after school (83% as opposed to 26.3%). The ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ categories for enjoy were actually equally likely to continue PE after school (42.6% and 42.9%). Thus, shifting more children from strongly disliking PE could potentially mean more participating in sport/PE after school.

Analysing from a gender perspective in the state school, there was not a big difference with males slightly more likely to continue after school (50% v 43.8%). Although small, the discrepancy could once again be to do with the profile of male sports and potentially more opportunities for an outlet.

When it came to ability 63.6% of the high ability felt they would continue to take part in sport after school but only 15.3% of low ability felt they would. Therefore, it seems that ability and enjoyment are both factors that make a difference to consideration of participation after pupils have left school. In the short term it may be more achievable to shift enjoyment than ability or perception of ability. However, undertaking a sport of choice may help to enhance both enjoyment and ability level.

Once again school type made a difference with 82.6% of the independent school and 47.3% of the state school intending to continue with sport after leaving school. This does once again fit in with aspirations of careers in the sector (see Chapter 8) and the perspective, enjoyment and ethos of sport in the independent school.

The main reasons for continuing sport after leaving school	Number of Pupils (n)
Like, enjoy, fun	29
Fitness, health and mental health	17
Particular sport	11
Career	8

Table 14: Reasons for continuing sport after leaving school

The main reason for continuing a sport after leaving school (see Table 14) was for fun and enjoyment, *'I think I will play football, not professionally but for fun with friends and maybe in a team'* and *'because I couldn't live without sport because I would be bored if it didn't exist'*.

Health and fitness were also a driving factor about continued participation with comments such as, *'keeps your physical health and mental health good'* and *'I love going to the gym because I feel better in myself'*.

Pursuing a particular sport of choice was another reason for participation after leaving school with comments such as, *'I will continue to play Rugby'* and *'I play table tennis and enjoy it a lot so I will definitely continue playing'*. This demonstrates the importance of children finding a particular sport they enjoy in order for them to want to continue it into life after school.

If their career choice was sport or related to sport this was also a driver for continued participation such as, *'I plan on joining the Navy, so sport is important'* and *'I want to go to America if I get offered a rugby scholarship to a college'*.

The main reasons for not continuing sport after leaving school	Number of Pupils (n)
Dislike sport/no interest	9
Time	4
Lack of ability	3

Table 15: Reasons for not continuing sport after leaving school

Dislike of sport with comments such as, *'I don't like sport'*, was the main reason tended for not continuing (see Table 15). However, finding a sport they liked did give the possibility of continuing despite not liking all sports. For example, there were comments such as *'too much stress, might continue to dance'* and *'because I hate sport other than football'*.

Time was also a factor that some felt would prevent continued participation with pupils saying, *'because I will not have much time'* and *'It isn't important however I will keep fit but playing sports takes up more time'*.

Occasionally someone did cite ability for not continuing such as, *'because it is really hard'* and *'I am trash'*.

In the interviews, pupils spoke of what they did now outside of school rather than plans for continuing in the future. However, James (IS) did allude to carrying on saying of sport, *'it's my hobby, my real passion'*. Michael (IS) also spoke of experiences outside of school, 'being inclusive'. Elaine (SS) mentioned continuing dance after school saying it was:

*'part of social'* and saying, *'so our dance, it can be from age 2, but then you can do up until, like whenever. We've got 20-year-olds who do it. There's no saying, 'Just because you're this age, it doesn't mean you can't join in.'*

Elaine (SS) does show some awareness of the lifelong nature of physical activity, although I do get the impression that 20 to her seems old!

## **6.2 Discussion**

### ***6.2.1 Participation and Enjoyment***

The main driver for young people participating in PE and sport is enjoyment, it is as simple as that. Although the health message about fitness is well received and truly heard by pupils (see Chapter 7) that alone is not enough to motivate the majority to participation. The greatest element is about them having fun and enjoying PE and sport. This factor occurs with regard to involvement now, any involvement outside school and potential future participation when they have left school. Obviously, due to the fact that participation in school is mandatory and prescribed, then they must participate whether they enjoy PE or not. Therefore, if situations can be created whereby mandatory prescribed participation is enjoyable this will give pupils a better experience and may encourage voluntary participation in other situations. This finding is congruent with Prochaska et al (2003) who argued that if PE promoted enjoyable experiences that would equate to promoting participation. Smith (2006) also found that pupils wanted more intrinsic emphasis in PE such as fun and enjoyment. Positive experiences in PE are linked to the enjoyment of the subject (Prochaska et al, 2003) and the fun factor is a crucial ingredient (Garn and Cothran, 2006). Conversely, bad experiences can cause negative emotions and humiliation and cause permanent damage to future participation (Carlson, 1995; Morgan and Hanson 2008; Morgan and Burke 2008; Lauritsalo et al, 2015). Kirk (2005) highlights the importance of early learning experience for lifelong participation in physical activity and this study does suggest more pupils enjoyed PE in primary school than secondary. In secondary school there is research evidence to suggest that pupils are alienated from PE due to the nature of the classes (Portman, 1995a). A number of studies have found that pupils experience difficulties and problems during PE participation (Fenczyn and Szmigiel, 2006; Kalogiannis, 2006; Oliver et al, 2009; Enright and O'Sullivan, 2010; Fisette, 2011; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011; von Seelen, 2012; Cardinal et al, 2013). Pupils in this study have reinforced such issues in participation in PE in areas such as pressure, choice, competitiveness, censure, stereotyping, favouritism and general dislike (also see

Chapters 5 and 9). However, this is not universal with many pupils gaining self-esteem, skill development and enjoyment from participation in the same lessons with the same curriculum.

Participation outside of school and continued participation when leaving school were linked strongly to enjoyment and ability. It was interesting to note that pupils who disagreed and agreed to liking PE were just as likely to consider continuing some form of PE after leaving school. It was those whom strongly disliked PE that were adamant they would not continue. Although ability also affected perceptions of continuing participation after school, it may be easier for schools to enhance enjoyment than ability and this could be an area to focus upon to increase future participation. A small shift in pupils along the enjoyment spectrum from 'strongly dislike' to 'dislike' could have lasting benefits for lifelong participation. Conversely, the danger therefore of a bad experience is significant as this can cause permanent damage to future participation (Lauritsalo, 2015). This makes it imperative that all pupils should have positive experiences and positive learning in PE (Lyngstad et al, 2016). Similarly, with PE activities outside of school, the fun or enjoyment factor can be key to participation in youth sports clubs (Littlefair and Nichol, 2019).

A number of factors can affect enjoyment in PE and subsequent participation. Choice (see Chapter 5) is intrinsically linked to participation with Michael (IS) talking about despising rugby because he was forced to participate. Thus, being able to choose may lead to enjoyment which leads to participation. This factor is demonstrated powerfully by Frank (IS) who enjoyed dance outside of school but found PE in school to be, '*morally degrading*'. If PE in school had offered dance, then maybe Frank would have viewed PE in a more positive manner. So why do the schools involved in PE not offer dance, they both have the freedom to not offer the National Curriculum? This could lie in the fact on whom decides what activities are offered and how they are offered in PE. Teachers tend to deliver PE shaped by their past experiences and rely on team sports (Ashton, 1988; Morgan and Hansen, 2008). Secondary PE teachers have all been successful in PE to be in a position to teach it and are the experts in this arena. They are the powerful agents in the field and have a habitus shaped by their experiences and dispositions (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, it can be argued that the PE teachers shape PE in the manner that they see fit, which is the manner in which they were successful, as they are a product of their own PE experiences and beliefs (Morgan and Hansen, 2008). This may then be a positive environment for children who excel in this model but for those who do not it can be a very uncomfortable negative experience (Safvenbom et al, 2014). The powerful agents (PE teachers) set the norm, so it is very hard for the pupils who like non-traditional PE activities such as dance to procure that onto the curriculum as they do not have the capital in this field to trade in any beneficial way (Bourdieu, 1986). This then reinforces the structures of the field and the habitus of the participants who excel within this order (ibid).

### ***6.2.2 School Phase and Participation***

Many pupils in this study were more likely to prefer PE in primary school. This concurred with Prochaska et al (2003) who found that as pupils get older their enjoyment level and positive attitude towards PE declines and a number of studies suggest a decline in popularity of PE between primary and secondary including Birtwhistle and Brodie, (1991) and Shropshire et al (2001). The reasons pupils enjoyed PE in primary school were that it was fun, social, less pressure and less competitive.

This disparity between primary and secondary then leads to the question who decides on the curriculum and process of PE in a primary school? Unlike the secondary school they tend to be non-specialist PE teachers, they bring their own experiences with them and may not be well prepared for or supported in CPD for such delivery (Armour and Yelling, 2003; Hardman, 2004; Keay, 2006; Morgan and Bourke, 2008). Such issues could be seen as detrimental, but they equate to primary PE teachers not having the same habitus as secondary PE teachers. Thus, PE in the primary school is more likely to reflect their influences and experiences (Bourdieu, 1986) which may have been different and potentially more negative than their secondary specialist counterparts (Morgan and Bourke, 2008). Although studies such as Carney and Armstrong, (1996) and Morgan and Hansen (2008) question the quality of PE provision in primary schools, it seems apparent that many pupils welcome the primary PE teacher approach. In addition, pupils in this study suggest activities like dance can feature and less competitive types of PE can be prevalent creating a more enjoyable experience. Although primary PE teachers can be decried for being non-specialist (Armour and Yelling, 2003; Morgan and Bourke, 2008), Subramaniam and Silverman (2007) state that this age-related decline in positive attitude could be due to pedagogy and a repetitive curriculum in secondary schools, which was mentioned by some pupils in the state school. On the contrary though, some pupils welcomed the secondary approach to PE with specialist staff and facilities and more competition and these can influence some pupils to like PE (Lauritsalo, 2012). Therefore, it is not a universal decline and may have other related factors rather than solely, pedagogy, curriculum and teachers.

### ***6.2.3 Gender and Participation***

Equal numbers of boys and girls liked PE in primary, but this was not the case in secondary, where boys were more likely to say they enjoyed PE. Therefore, the decline in enjoyment of PE between primary and secondary school was more marked for girls. One explanation could be that girls may be more likely to be embarrassed playing sport as they get older as it does not fit with their body image (Shropshire et al, 1997). This correlates with Elaine (SS) talking about girls not wanting to partake in PE in case it messed their hair. Walseth et al (2017) found that girls like to spend time doing their hair and make-up after PE, but schools may not allow the amount of time they require and hence put them off participation. Anxiety about their bodies or appearance and fear of peer judgement can cause

girls to skip PE classes (ibid). In a poll of 2,000 teenagers almost one-third avoided activities like PE because of body confidence and fears about their looks (YMCA, 2017). Girl's identity can be a construction of the body and body ideals, and these can occupy the PE class without challenge (Walseth et al, 2017). Girls in this study indicated this link between the body and PE feeling scrutinised by others and not wanting PE to affect aspects of their appearance. This can particularly affect girls and giving them enough time to cool down and change can improve participation (Guardian, 2017).

A number of girls spoke of being judged by peers and teachers regarding skills when in PE, which is exacerbated by competition and can impede the participation of some girls (Guardian, 2017). Elaine (SS) had really enjoyed PE in her primary school but the greater competition in secondary, judgements she felt were made against her, and issues with other pupils alienated her from PE in secondary school. Therefore, such judgements and competition can make pupils feel that PE was not a positive experience or environment, and this could affect participation (Light and Curry, 2008; Park and Eom, 2018).

#### ***6.2.4 Competitiveness and Participation***

Competitiveness does not just discourage girls, it can also deter boys in PE. Frank (IS) and Edward (SS) talked about making PE non- competitive and this would re-engage a fun element and hence participation. Children engaged in sporting activity can see the focus on winning as detrimentally affecting the enjoyment of participation in a sport (Littlefair and Nichol, 2019). However, this was not a universal feeling as some pupils like the competitive element of sport such as Charles (SS), Luke (IS) and James (IS) as it was their 'time to shine'. This study suggests that it tends to be the pupils who are good at traditional PE and sport that like the competitive nature of it. This links to the habitus of a successful PE student, one who is stereotypically assertive and competitive in play (Bourdieu, 1986). Paechter (2003) argues that winning is paramount in PE in the UK and as the focus of PE is competitive team games then a dominating body to overcome an opponent is central to and predominates PE. The pupils who tend to want less competition do not have the required habitus or social capital in PE to change the doxa (Bourdieu, 1986). They are at odds with those who have benefitted in this field (those who shine) and of the most powerful agents (teachers) who see their habitus reflected in those pupils who thrive in this environment (Bourdieu, 1986; Brown, 2015a). However, even though these children liked the competitive nature of sport, the drive to win as opposed to development and learning could cause a negative effect (Croston, 2013; Brown, 2015a). The high ability did want to develop (see Chapter 8) and although some cited winning as a key outcome (Charles, SS) most would place their own improvement as paramount. Tischler and McCaughy (2011) advocate PE focussed on cooperation and compassion with reduced competition and elite performance. For some this would undoubtedly improve participation but for pupils who thrive in the competitive PE environment, those who feel this is their domain to demonstrate achievement, any change to the field could be detrimental to their participation.

### ***6.2.5 Favouritism and Participation***

Competition in PE can also feed into the issue of favouritism as the nature of PE lessons can favour pupils involved in competitive youth sports (Safvenbom et al, 2014). Many of the female pupils spoke about favouritism including Karen and Elaine (both SS). Karen (SS) spoke of girls having favoured positions as gatekeepers to teams, concurring with Jopling and Riordan (2021) who expressed that teachers can give favoured pupils awards and privileges. Wetton et al, (2013) found in a study of 60 girls that over half felt the PE teachers focused upon the more able pupils. This could be once again linked to habitus and how PE teachers perceive their pupils, with Elaine (SS) linking this to physique and Karen (SS) to ability. It could be argued that if pupils reflect the habitus of the PE teacher and have the desired social capital, they are more likely to get praise or be picked for teams (Bourdieu, 1986). This was certainly stated by some girls in the interviews and the survey, but interestingly rarely mentioned by boys. One reason for this could be that PE is dominated by masculine identity (Bramham, 2003). Therefore, boys possibly do not see praise going to able and competitive pupils with the 'ideal' physique, as favouritism, rather it is the ideal to aspire to become. However, Michael (IS) did hint that lack of ability limited participation.

### ***6.2.6 Types of Sport/PE and Participation***

Participation in different types of sport in PE and outside of school were very much along traditional lines. For example, rugby dominated in the independent school, with football dominating for boys and netball for girls in the state school. Wilson (2002) found that people of higher social class are less likely to participate in proletariat sport with Bell (2005) citing social capital as an influential factor in sports participation across social classes. These could be contributing factors to rugby being the dominant sport in the independent school and football/netball in the state school. Stereotypes still seem to prevail, which could be once again due to the powerful agents in the field. The PE teachers, by construction, excelled in the traditional sports of the past and that is how they view PE which can lead to sports and games-orientated sessions dominating (Kirk, 2004; Morgan and Hanson, 2008). Therefore, they perpetuate this culture of male/female and state/independent school cultures of sport. The domination of team sports in PE can favour boys and marginalise sports preferred by girls such as dance and gymnastics (Wetton et al, 2013). This can lead to the participation of girls in PE being controlled by gender stereotypes (Azzarito et al, 2006; Azzarito & Solmon, 2009).

Society and media also contribute to this culture, with those sports portrayed as mixed gender such as tennis and some Olympic sports being evenly played between genders and school sectors. Whereas those sports depicted in the media as predominantly male such as football are still being played mainly by boys in schools. Wetton et al (2013) suggested that the main stereotypes of gender and sport are created by the media. Ann (SS) certainly saw this cultural influence affecting how pupils viewed the gender of sport. There has been a strong development in women's

football over the last decade with a professional league, more TV coverage and female players acting as pundits on shows such as football focus and match of the day. The England Women's football team has reached the semi-finals of the last two world cups and have qualified for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic games. Given all this progress, why is participation not on par with males? It could be that female PE teachers came through a system where this was not the case, so they do not see football as part of the PE portfolio for girls. They are a product of their upbringing and certain sports for females may not reflect their habitus with social order being reproduced across generations (Bourdieu, 1986; Smith, 2020). However, the children today, having media influence of the profile of women's football shaping their habitus, will be more likely to reflect that when they are the powerful PE agents of the future. This is already apparent with some of the girls being frustrated about not getting opportunities in sports such as football as they do not see them as alien to females. Sport identity does seem to be shaped by social and cultural predispositions (Brewer et al, 1993; Wright and Laverty, 2010; Wheeler, 2012) but these can be different for PE teachers and pupils due to the generation gap in their habitus (Bourdieu, 1986; Smith, 2020). Thus, despite unquestionable progress regarding PE, it is apparent that gender barriers still can influence the participation of girls (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010).

It is not just girls who suffer from stereotyping in PE, as gender barriers can also affect the participation of boys (Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011). Not a single boy participated in netball, despite this being a physically demanding team sport. Similarly, dance seemed to be only on offer in school to girls, even though some boys participated in it outside of school. Culture and society appear to play a large part in this, with boys fearing ridicule if they participated in a traditional female activity. What boys should do and how they should be in the PE class can be regulated by hegemonic masculine values (Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011). The masculine characteristics of PE prohibit males from partaking in sports that do not meet this ideal (Bramham, 2003; Brown, 2015a). Teacher habitus creates the pedagogies, culture and relationships with pupils in boys PE and helps generate the hegemonic masculinity of the environment (Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011) preventing participation in 'non-masculine' sports. On the contrary, many pupils felt they should be able to participate in all sports, with Ann (SS) seeing the solution as mixed gender participation in schools. However, Walseth et al (2017) in a Norwegian study found that girls in mixed gender PE wanted gender segregation. Elaine (SS) saw schools as the place to drive the change and set the example. This would obviously need to change the rules of the game (doxa) with the powerful agents (teachers and pupils who thrive in the environment) and is hard to be driven by pupils without the social capital or habitus that influences such agents. The predetermined disposition of the field tends to be elitist and dominated by hegemonic masculinity rather than being inclusive. Although circumstances outside of PE can be created to allow fun and non-judgemental physical activity (Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011) a seismic paradigm shift would be needed in PE to change the philosophy from hegemonic and elitist to inclusive and safe.



The main sports that children participated in outside of school were also in general quite traditional. Football and rugby being the top two with rugby being more prevalent and the top participative sport for pupils in the independent sector. This reflects the situation in schools but also reflects the structures of society as well as the availability and accessibility in the community. There does seem to be a degree of specialisation for pupils, although that is not a necessary requirement for high performance by the end of childhood (Bridge and Toms, 2013). Football and rugby are the two biggest team sports in the UK, and they have the infrastructure and finance in youth sport to be readily available. The status of these sports can be seen by pupils and parents as the key sports to be involved in. Parents in particular can be influential in the sports children participate in (Kanters et al, 2008) and this could reflect the habitus of parents who were also involved in such sports when they were young. Social capital is an influential factor in sports participation across social classes (Bell, 2005) with those of higher social class less likely to participate in proletarian sports (Wilson, 2002). The findings do reinforce the social class system and inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 1996) and that could be due to parental habitus or simply because in this instance a rugby club had direct links to independent school but not to the state schools. Similarly, Ann (SS) stated that she played netball outside of school due to a link the state school had, so accessibility can be a factor in choice of outside school participation. However, Craig and Beedie (2012) found that middle classes do tend to participate in sports that are largely associated with the middle class. So maybe the link between the independent schools and rugby reflects the habitus and social capital of the teachers, parents, pupils and organisations, as does netball with the state school (Bourdieu, 1986). The education system in this case maintaining social inequalities and the status quo (Bourdieu, 1986; Sullivan, 2002) through the medium of PE.

Rugby and football were the most popular out of school sports and both are traditionally seen as male sports. This could inhibit female participation as Fintoff and Scraton (2001) found that a traditional game-based PE curriculum was unlikely to tempt many girls into an active lifestyle. As this study indicates, schools can limit the sports that girls are given the opportunity to play, which if they did participate in football or rugby, it could stimulate their interest and they may well go on to join clubs outside of school (Guardian, 2017). It would still need to be available for them, although, more females are playing football and rugby as governing bodies are attaching lucrative grants to encourage female participation (Sport England, 2015). Netball, which was traditionally the team sport of females in school, did not in the past have a grassroots infrastructure outside of school. That is beginning to change now with the netball women's super league and the high profile of netball following the England team winning gold at the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

Dance featured as the third most popular sport to participate in outside of school. This is an activity which hardly ever features in school which demonstrates that there is not necessarily a causal link between PE in school and participation outside of school. Similar to football and rugby, dance has an infrastructure at grassroots level and thus is more accessible within the community. It is also culturally quite popular with TV shows such as 'Strictly' giving it

a high status. This may have given it some cultural capital for participation with both genders. Although it was historically seen as a female domain (Risner, 2009) more males do participate now as demonstrated by Frank (IS). He enjoyed participation in dance outside of school but strongly disliked PE within school. Although this does suggest no causal link between PE and participation outside school, if PE included dance, then he certainly would have viewed the lesson more favourably. The reason could be that male PE teachers feel uncomfortable about teaching dance to boys (Gard, 2001) or in fact reinforce negative stereotypes (Noble and Bradford, 2000). However, such attitudes are changing, and it increasingly seen as acceptable male behaviour (Holdsworth, 2013).

Going to the Gym was the fourth most likely sports activity that pupils participated in outside of school. Once again this is usually more accessible within the community. This tended to be seen as a mechanism for losing weight for both genders. Weight and exercise were quite entangled for some pupils, and this was the main purpose of exercise for them. The government views PE as a positive way to combat childhood obesity (Datar and Sturm, 2004) and this is a message which pupils seem to have picked up. Habitus plays a part in this as being overweight is not seen as an acceptable disposition in society. Pupils in the overweight category tend not to have social capital to trade (Bourdieu, 1986) and can be victims of bullying. Their vulnerability is greatly exposed in a subject such as PE as they have to get changed in front of others, wear t-shirts and shorts which do not hide weight issues and then have to run and take part in exertion exercises (see Chapter 7). The gym may also fit into the ‘fitness discourse’ rather than the ‘sports discourse’ for girls (Walseth et al, 2017) and therefore be seen as an activity that represents a female driver for physical activity. This links to weight and the drive for physical activity as a vehicle for dieting (Walseth et al, 2017) in order to shape the ‘bad body’ (Garrett, 2004b). Thus, one argument could be that making PE more related to fitness activities for the body may encourage greater participation and empowerment for girls (Frank, 1991; 1995). However, on the contrary a number of researchers argue that this would emphasise the focus on sculpting the body which could give primacy to the body and reinforce stereotypes (Scruton, 1992; Markula & Pringle, 2006; Azzarito, 2010; Fangen, 2010; Scruton, 2013).

### ***6.2.7 Other Barriers to out of School Participation***

Participation outside of school could also be affected by finance with 7/12 interviewees linking finance to opportunity. Most community activities come at a cost so this can prohibit participation for some pupils such as Elaine (SS) and Michael (IS) indicated. The legendary footballer Kenny Dalglish, who was from a working-class background in Glasgow, stated that as a child he would play any sport he could afford to participate in (Dalglish and Winter, 1996). Finkelstine et al (2012) found that parents with higher income and better education can organise sports for their children whereas children from poorer families tend to play in non-organised cheaper sports which make sports, such as football, easier to engage with. Thus, economic capital can play a part in out of school participation reinforcing the inequalities of opportunity (Bourdieu 1986; Smith, 2020). Other barriers to outside

participation could also include commitment, ability and culture. If children are not deemed to have the ability or commitment, it seems the powerful agents (in this case the coaches, high level athletes, other parents) may not see beneficial capital or reflection of habitus in them (Bourdieu, 1986) and therefore discriminate against their participation. As some pupils, such as Gary (IS), alluded to, this could take the form of them being on the side-lines in match day activity or being asked to leave the club or team or not allowed to join in the first place. This type of discrimination can be typical but is not universal, as it depends on the ethos of the powerful agents (Littlefair and Nichol, 2019).

#### **6.2.8 Summary**

Many of the issues that prevent enjoyment and subsequent participation in PE can be linked to favouritism, social cultural stereotyping regarding gender, class, ability, physique, opportunity and economic capital. It can be argued through the framework of social field theory that this is an attempt to keep the dominance of a certain group, to ensure the continued social order and reproduce inequality and privilege (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 1996; Sullivan, 2002; Bathmaker, 2015; Smith, 2020). Certainly, some children thrive in this environment, but many are alienated (Fairclough et al, 2002; Green and Thurston, 2002; Cale and Harris, 2005). Pedagogies to promote participation sustaining beyond school could be key to address such issues (Armour and Harris, 2013).

# Chapter 7. Theme: Health

‘so, it might make you feel better’ (Oscar, IS)

## 7.1 Findings: Health

### 7.1.1 PE and Health

The message, which the Government has been advocating to children and adults alike, that physical activity is good for your health has clearly resonated with this group of pupils (see Figure 12).

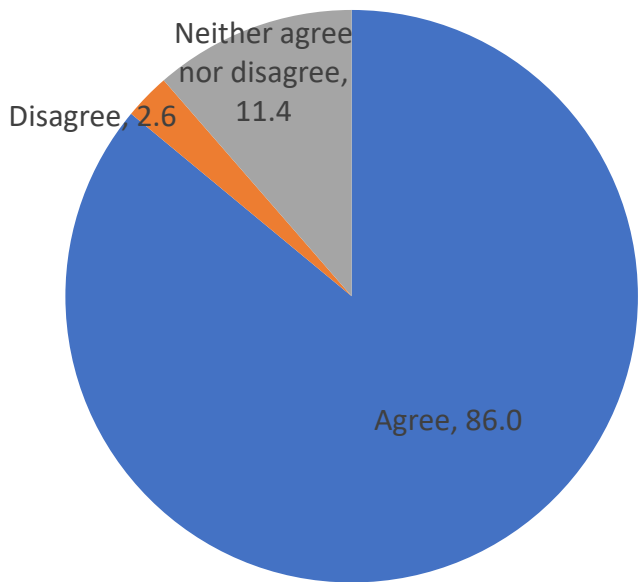


Figure 12: Percentage of pupils who think PE is good for your health

Overwhelmingly, pupils seem to have accepted that physical activity is good for your health. This in turn begs the question, if the pupils are aware of this benefit why do so many not participate after school or plan to continue with sport/physical activity when they leave school?

There was no discernible difference between people who participate or do not participate in sport outside school or between genders with all groups feeling that PE was good for their health. However, 90.9% of high ability felt PE was good for their health but this fell to 57% of lower ability pupils thinking it was good for their health with 21% of this group thinking it was not good for their health. This was similar when controlling for enjoyment as the group that was more likely to say PE was not good for your health were those who strongly disliked PE, with 21.1% who strongly disliked PE not thinking it was good for their health. Could this be because of the mental health issues it can cause with pressure and anxiety (see Chapter 9)? Could pupils who do not enjoy PE and those that feel they are low

ability suffer detriment to their mental health in PE? This question will be returned to later in this chapter. Some of the reasons stated by the pupils in the questionnaire survey were in terms of school PE making little difference to health such as, *'we do not do it regularly meaning it has very little effect'* and *'no because you could be doing better things out of school'*.

The interviews reflected the questionnaire philosophy of PE being good for your health. Luke (IS) talked about the importance of Physical health, *'I think PE is pretty important as if you don't do physical exercise, obviously you won't be as healthy as you could be'*. The type of health benefit alluded to, however, was not exclusively physical with Gary (IS) mentioning:

*'It keeps you fit, I think. That is a massive benefit. Then, there are also the benefits of... I don't know. It's sort of, like I said with rugby, when I was doing revision it's like a break in the school day. You might have had a full morning of maths or something, maths and English, and then you've got this little chunk of PE that splits it up and allows you to just sort of calm down and start the day sort of again.'*

So, taking pupils away from the rigors of academic study were seen as a benefit to mental health.

The fact that a number of pupils feel PE is not good for health, usually citing mental health, were reinforced by the experiences of 5/12 pupils in the interviews. Frank (IS) who identified as less able in PE reported:

*'I reckon it's probably given me a bit of a thick skin. Yes, like, I'm very confident, and if someone criticises me, I'd, sort of, contest that. I'd be, like, "Why?" I stand up for myself. I think those are quite good skills to have in life, but I don't think you should have learnt them by being shouted at and, like, having mental and moral pain.'*

He also suggested that it was not just low ability that could feel mental health issues in PE but those who are able and may face rejection, *'Obviously, if a football team- there're, like, 20 people, but there'll be millions who've been trying to get there, and that, obviously, affects your mental health if you're trying but you don't actually get to do that.'* Both these scenarios outlined by Frank (IS) demonstrate quite explicitly the detrimental impact that PE can have upon mental health.

### **7.1.2 Benefits of PE on health**

The main reasons cited by pupils in the survey as why PE is good for your health were:

- 1) Fitness and exercise (n=131)
- 2) Weight (n=24)
- 3) Mental health (n=8)

This was also linked to what pupils saw as the benefits of PE and sport with them citing the main benefits of PE and sport as:

- 1) Physical Health and fitness (n=90)
- 2) Skills and ability (n=20)
- 3) Weight (n=15)
- 4) Social (n=9)
- 5) Mental Health (n=8)

The majority of the reasons of why PE is beneficial were to do with physical health, fitness and exercise but a number also related to weight. Comments featured exercise being good for the heart, *'because it keeps your heart strong and able to keep your health levels and longer life expectancy up'* and *'keeps your heart beating and lowers rates of cancer'*. The various government campaigns regarding exercise and health had succeeded in getting the message and, in some cases, the recommended guideline of the amount of activity through to pupils, with statements such as, *'because we are meant to do at least 30 mins of physical exercise a day'*.

In the interviews Michael (IS) saw the main purpose of PE as health and fun, *'Yes, I'm getting healthier and having fun and enjoying to play together as a team'*. Enjoyment seems to dictate participation (see Chapter 6) and maybe health is the beneficial by product?

Edward (SS) did see physical benefits to PE but not to physique, *'Well obviously I've got physically better over time, but we spend that little time a week in PE that you can't really see any human changes, like a development in muscles or anything'*. Although other pupils did link weight loss to PE with comments such as, *'it is a way to help you lose weight'*. Some responses alluded to the negativity surrounding weight with PE as the panacea, *'because you are keeping fit, which everyone should so you don't become overweight or obese'*. Although weight was not particularly focussed upon in the focus groups the anonymity of the questionnaire seems to have allowed pupils a greater sense of security to raise the issue. In fact, 19% females and 15% males linked weight to a benefit of PE. Thus, weight does seem to be an issue with teenagers both male and female. It is not just a reason why they think PE is good for your health, although many do, it is also about avoiding negative consequences of weight such as bullying, with statements like, *'you lose loads of weight so no one bully's you'*. Culture also seems to play a part with PE seen as a tool to help reduce or control weight, with statements such as *'losing weight, being healthier'* and *'it might make me skinnier, that's all the benefits'*.

In the interviews Elaine (SS) made the link between PE and weight. She explained, *'I know a couple of my friends have done a couple of things like that, where they've joined back into a sport, or joined a sport as, like, to help them with- say, one of my friends wants to do it because of weight loss.'* Edward (SS) spoke of how weight has curtailed

his sport participation, *'I was quite a good cyclist. I was top of my county, but I had some issues with eating, and I got quite overweight, and I don't do that anymore. Cycling was something I enjoyed.'* Although pupils mainly link involvement in PE to losing weight, Edward (SS) suggests that weight prevented him from continuing participation.

### **7.1.3 PE and mental health**

Some of the main reasons cited regarding the benefit of PE were centred around health and fitness and included mental health. Comments made were such as, *'Keeps you fit, helps you maintain a healthy lifestyle'*, *'the benefits of sport and PE are that you have a happy and healthy lifestyle'* and *'Mental-it helps me to relax'*. The mental health side of PE was mentioned nearly as much as the physical health side as a benefit and normally they were mentioned together such as, *'they help me feel both physically and mentally healthier'*.

Although many mental health comments were linked to other benefits with regard to PE being good for your health with comments like, *'keeps your physical, mental and social state in a good place'*, there were some that solely focused upon mental health such as *'helps mental health'*. However, one person did allude to this positive effect being linked to type of sport, *'it helps us feel healthier and it helps clear my mind sometimes. But it depends on what sport'*. This could be to do with feeling less pressure or more enjoyment with some sports or the importance of choice? This recognition that it is not necessarily applicable as good for mental health across the board was also mentioned with one pupil stating, *'it gets you active, it relieves stress (sometimes) you can make friends (sometimes)'*.

The interviews illuminated a more complex relationship between PE and mental health. Some pupils highlighting PE as a positive contributor to mental health such as James (IS):

*'It brings people closer together. It's just enjoyment really. It relieves stress from exams. It's quite nice to have a game at the weekend and forget about your exams for a bit.'*

Pupils such as Oscar (IS) and Elaine (SS) reinforced this positive side of PE and mental health. Oscar (IS) felt, *'So, it might make you feel better, so your emotional stuff around that'*, and Elaine (SS) also saw this range of benefits saying, *'I think it'd help you physically, mentally, emotionally. I think it would help everything, in different ways'*.

On the contrary the negative effect of PE on the mental health of Edward (SS) was stark:

*'Well, personally, I dread going to PE. Like today, I'm on a workshop, but normally I'd have PE then English, 4th and 5th. And I tend to only go through PE, because I quite enjoy English. So, if I were to rate it, it'd probably be quite low, because obviously I prefer my academic subjects.'*

Frank (IS) also felt PE was a contributor to mental health problems, *'Oh, definitely. I think, obviously, all these mental health problems are on the rise. I think a contributing factor of that has got to be how we're dealt with every day at school. Obviously, PE, sports, and I think that has a big impact on it.'* Therefore, a subject that can aid mental health for some can take a terrible toll on the mental health of others.

Elaine (SS) felt PE could aid and be detrimental to mental health, but suggested resilience as a way forward:

*'the reasons why people don't like to do them are because they, maybe, don't even feel good about themselves, or feel like they can do it, or things like that. If everyone had that thought, like, "Well, I can do whatever," not in that sense where they're big of themselves, but in that sense where, like, "I don't care what people think. I don't care what I think. I just need to crack on with it." It's a lesson, at the end of the day.'*

#### **7.1.4 Summary**

Although pupils overwhelmingly link PE as of benefit to health, they have highlighted the complexities with PE and health and demonstrated it is more nuanced than at first glance. This is especially with the link between PE and mental health and also to some degree to weight.

### **7.2 Discussion**

The objective of physical education to contribute to health is apparent on a worldwide basis (Quennerstedt, 2019). The relationship between health and PE in schools and the benefits PE can bring to tackle issues, such as obesity, have been argued extensively (Shephard and Trudeau, 2000; Green 2002a; Trost, 2006; McKenzie, 2007). Many studies have shown that health benefits are gained from a physically active lifestyle (Pasco et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2012; Wen & Wu, 2012), and being active as a child can improve the likelihood of being physically active in adulthood (Harro & Riddoch, 2000). Many PE activists advocate the contribution of PE to the wellbeing and health of children (Rink and Mitchell 2002).

#### **7.2.1 Health and Participation in PE**

This study indicates that the message about physical activity, such as PE in school, being good for health has been received by pupils loud and clear. In some respects, you could say 'job done' to the Government and Public Health England. Whether pupils participated in sport outside of school or were of different gender did not affect their view that PE is indeed good for your health. This is a socio-cultural message that has transcended the population and pupils are not impervious to this message. However, this did not necessarily translate into their participation in PE.



Health is not just related to the individual in isolation as it also depends upon the relationship with their surroundings (Lindstrom & Eriksson, 2010; Quennerstedt et al, 2010). Therefore, participation for health reasons may need a wider remit with Chorney (2011) advocating a health and PE joint curriculum to develop a lifelong understanding of linking PE to health. However, Harris et al (2016) argue that although it has been key to the PE curriculum, there is not very much evidence that it has had an impact upon the behaviour and knowledge of pupils. The approach of teachers, health messages and culture can limit the conceptualisation of health and physical activity (ibid). It does seem from pupils in this study that health can be a reason for participation in some cases but that alone does not stimulate participation for all. Strauss et al (2001) found that health was not a driver for physical activity participation, it was more likely to be self-efficacy. There was evidence from pupils that such self-belief was aided by choice (see Chapter 5) and ability setting (see Chapters 5, 6, 8 and 9).

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that children should engage in a minimum of 1 hour of physical activity per day (WHO, 2010). A study by the Health and Social Care Information Centre, (2015) found that of children aged 5-15 only 21% boys and 16% of girls aged 5–15 years achieve the recommended daily 1 hour of moderately intense physical activity. It seems apparent that pupils involved in this study would in general agree that PE has a health benefit but that does not necessarily lead to participation and such involvement is far more nuanced. According to Gallotta (2010) and Strong et al (2005) participation in physical activity on a regular basis improves a child's physical and mental health. However, pupils in this study highlight that this link is far more complex. In particular, there are categories of pupils who are more likely to have a different opinion on PE being good for your health. This occurs when analysing ability and enjoyment of pupils in PE, and their views on health. In both these categories a considerable number of pupils (21%) who felt they were low ability or did not like PE stated that PE is not good for your health. This seemed to be a result of their experiences and how they feel during, prior, or following participation. Frank (IS) who self-identified as less able in PE spoke of '*mental and moral pain*'. This could reflect mental health issues experienced by pupils caused by pressure, anxiety, ridicule and censure as discussed in Chapter 9. Wright (1999) described that in PE classrooms with a hegemonic culture of masculinity, low ability boys or those not demonstrating aggression and competitiveness were bullied and marginalised. Power relationships and sociocultural constructions of masculinity and femininity can marginalise both boys and girls in PE (Wright, 1999). However, Carter & Micheli (2012) found that children participating in regular physical activity can improve physical, emotional, social and mental health. Thus, although literature can suggest a positive link between physical activity and mental health (Bailey et al, 2012; Moeijes et al, 2018) which is corroborated by some pupils in this study, the opposite affect is true for other pupils who tend to be the less able or those with less enjoyment (which also could feature most, if not all, of the less able).

### ***7.2.2 The Paradox of PE and health***

Although physical health predominated when benefits of PE were cited, mental health did play a significant role. Many pupils saw it as a break from the rigors of academic life, a release and something they enjoyed and looked forward to participation. A by-product of taking part in PE is that the brain releases chemicals called endorphins which can make a person feel happy and gives pain relief (Weir, 2008). This suggests a mental health benefit as, ‘physical activity programs containing elements of aerobics, strength and flexibility training, dance, and various perceptual motor elements appear to have a beneficial association with anxiety, depression, and self-concept’ (Siegel, 2006, p.1). Eime et al (2013) found that sports participation improves physical health, social health and psychological health. Team sports were singled out as improving psychosocial health (ibid) yet many pupils in this study were more likely to face censure in team sports. Notwithstanding studies such as Moeijes et al (2018), Eime et al (2013) and Bailey et al (2012) citing and advocating a positive impact of PE on health (including mental health), for many pupils in this study, PE was something they dreaded, and participation had a negative impact upon their mental health. Despite the fact schools have a responsibility to promote emotional health (Jayman et al, 2021), the contribution of PE to well-being can be questioned as it can strengthen deleterious self-perceptions (Bloodworth and McNamee, 2009). Why is there such disparity in PE? How can the mental health of some thrive in the environment and yet be so detrimental to others? Examining the evidence through the lens of Bourdieu’s social field theory, does the reason lie in the habitus of the individual and the social capital they possess? Is the doxa set up in such a way to impact so radically differently on the mental health of participants? PE is constructed in the main by PE teachers who have been successful in that field. Thus, they construct future fields in a similar vein to their experiences. Therefore, it reflects their predispositions and habitus and the social capital that they possess (Bourdieu, 1986). This in turn creates an environment where a certain habitus and degrees of social capital can thrive (ibid). PE is different to the other academic subjects, hence pupils with a certain habitus and social capital look forward to this arena as it is suitable for their skills and talents. As a result, they gain self-worth and self-esteem which impacts positively upon their mental health and enjoyment of the subject. This in turn means they are more likely to participate in the sport not only in the present but also in the future. Alternatively, if the field is alien to a pupil’s habitus and social capital, participation can be more of a struggle meaning they do not have the skills and ability to shine, adapt and survive. If they are perceived to help the team win, they get social benefits such as inclusion, acceptance and status but being perceived to perform badly can lead to censure, humiliation and exclusion (Hills, 2007). Thus, this leads to extrinsic and intrinsic pressure and anxiety which decreases self-worth and self-esteem and damages mental health. Therefore, PE and mental health can be a paradox with a duality of being good and bad for the mental health of its participants at the same time. The World Health organisation define health as ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease or infirmity’ (WHO, 1948) and that physical activity promotes ‘psychological well-being, reduces stress, anxiety and depression’ (WHO, 2003, p.3). In this definition PE is not about improving health for some pupils as it is injurious, although for others it is health positive. Quennerstedt

(2008) argues that from a salutogenic perspective to improve their health, pupils should not participate in PE at school. Ultimately, PE affects different pupils in a range of ways with some (for example, those deemed low ability) seeming to be more predisposed to having a negative experience from a health perspective. This represents the health paradox of PE, which is highlighted by the experiences of pupils in this study, but not something to feature in the debate of PE and health which, salutogenics aside, generally accepts a positive outcome to participation.

### ***7.2.3 Weight and PE***

The relationship between weight, health and PE also emerged in the study. This is also more complex than it initially appears. One of the main contributing factors of obesity in children is directly linked to the lack of physical activity (Department of Health, 2006). Many academic papers as well as newspapers and magazines advocate undertaking PE to arrest the march of obesity and become thin (Evans, 2003) with Starc and Strel (2012) advocating the synergy of PE and tackling obesity. A considerable number of pupils mentioned weight as a benefit of PE with similar numbers across gender (19%F v 15%M). On one hand PE was seen as something that was good for keeping weight down and controlling weight. The health message of obesity seems to have also percolated through to young people and many could see PE as a tool to help prevent such a scenario in themselves. Edward (SS) in the interviews spoke about the onset of weight gain preventing him from PE participation and this having a detrimental effect upon him. However, the complexity that arises is twofold and both linked to mental health. The first is that it did feel that in some responses this preoccupation with weight loss could be an obsession and that was not necessarily good for mental health. The second is that anyone overweight or perceived to be overweight has nowhere to hide in PE and this leads to pressure, anxiety and bullying which all in turn detract from mental health. Children deemed overweight are more likely to be the victims of bullying than those deemed 'normal' weight (McCormack et al, 2011; Brixval et al, 2012) and this can lead to coping mechanisms such as avoiding PE (Puhl and Luedicke, 2012). Such issues lead to psychological distress (Kaltiala-Heino et al, 2016) and detract from mental health. However, PE can be used in a positive sense for health regarding the issue of weight with a number of pupils alluding to the fact that keeping weight down would help prevent bullying, so in this sense this could help mental health. Once again there is a paradox and duality of weight in PE, with it aiding health by controlling weight or being detrimental to health through bullying. The issue of bullying of pupils that are overweight is not something that is tackled readily in schools (Puhl and Luedicke, 2012). Such pupils tend to suffer in silence although it is indicative among pupils both overweight or not, that it occurs (ibid).

Defining what is overweight is a social construction, it is not a measure of body fat which is harder to do (Evans, 2003). The rhetoric in academia as well as society can stigmatise people who are deemed to be overweight (Evans, 2003). The use of language tends to associate weight as a bad thing regularly using terms like 'weight problems' even in parliamentary narrative such as a House of Commons report (2001). Such discourse can lead to those

deemed overweight to face ‘ridicule and harassment and the right to publicly monitor the body shape of others’ (Gard and Wright, 2001, p. 546). Nonconformities from the sociocultural ideal body shape can be classed as unhealthy and immoral (Quennerstedt, 2019). This narrative can make individuals feel ashamed of their bodies which causes anxiety (especially in PE) and can create an obsession with weight and the body (Evans, 2003). Even the World Health Organisation link obesity to ideal body shape in particularly for females (WHO, 2003; 2005b; Bloodworth and McNamee, 2009). For females, issues to do with their bodies can be amplified in physical education due to an environment where it is hard to hide your body shape and it can be easily judged by others (Fisette, 2011). The socially constructed ideal body features appearance, shape and size, expressly athletic and muscular for males and slender and non-muscular for females (Azzarito and Solmon, 2006b). All pupils can conduct surveillance on their bodies in these circumstances and this can be detrimental to self-worth if they feel they do not match up. This can lead to a stress anxiety and destructive obsession with their body. Predominantly, this can affect the way girls feel about and view their bodies and can lead to disempowerment or empowerment depending on their comparison (Cockburn and Clarke 2002; Garrett 2004a; Hills 2007). Although in this study nearly as many boys as girls raised the issue of weight in PE. For all pupils there is no easier arena to suffer the consequences of this stigma than in the PE class. Could this be also linked to habitus and social capital in PE? The habitus of a sport’s person includes their physique which looks to match the social capital associated with performance in the field (Bourdieu, 1986). The continuous reconnaissance of body shape and size that PE allows, creates a narrative about the body by the observer or teacher which can be judgemental i.e., unhealthy, lazy etc. (Oliver and Lalik, 2004; Markula and Pringle, 2006). This is something that is exacerbated in PE compared to other subjects. Therefore, those without such physique are seen as having nothing to trade and thus ostracised and criticised in teams, being seen as the weak link. Boyle et al (2008) found that some PE teachers associate lower ability pupils with lack of fitness. Thus, if someone appears to be overweight, they could be deemed to be not fit and as they do not reflect the habitus of a high ability PE pupil, they are therefore labelled as a low ability one. Harris et al (2016) argue that a pupil can be fit and healthy no matter what their size, and regular physical activity is not dependent upon being able at sport. This could well be true, but the reality of the situation can be socially constructed norms and judgements preventing full participation for children due to the psychological pressure placed upon their mental health.

#### ***7.2.4 Summary***

The link between PE and health is much more complex than generally accepted. Undoubtedly, it can aid help both mental and physical health, but it can be equally detrimental to mental health. The visibility of the body and social construction of weight can also hinder participation to aid physical health and can create mental health issues.

# Chapter 8. Theme: Development and Ability

‘lesser ability get pushed aside’ (Karen, SS)

## 8.1 Findings: Development and Ability

### 8.1.1 PE and skill development

When asked in the questionnaire about the main benefits of PE, skills and abilities were second only to health in the opinions of pupils with n=20 in this category. The main skills developed in PE, as cited by pupils, can be seen in Figure 13.

If a pupil participated in sport outside of school and enjoyed PE, they were more likely to think that school PE develops skills. If they thought of their ability in PE as good, they were also far more likely to feel that PE develops skills compared to if they felt that their ability was not good (65% to 21%). This could obviously be linked to performance and how the children see skill development.

The independent school pupils were much more likely to think that PE developed skills 95.5% as opposed to 53.8% in the state school. This could be because they fell into the categories mentioned previously or due to the ethos of the school, as indicated by pupils, as one of sporting excellence.

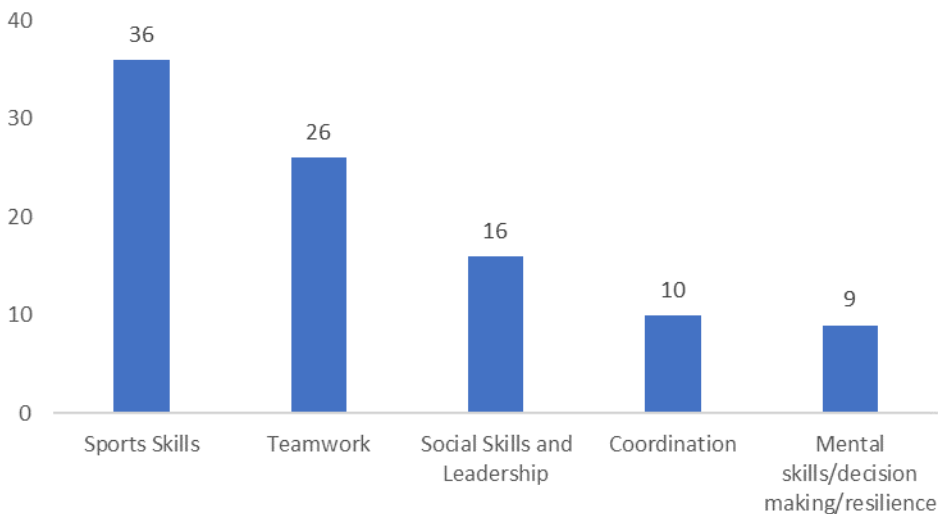


Figure 13: The main skills which PE develops

Pupils mentioned that PE and sport, *'develop skills and improve your ability in the sport you choose to do'* and *'learning how to play sports and to get better by playing it outside and inside school'*. Although these comments relate to sports skills, they did see PE and sport developing other skills, *'you can develop skills and you can work with others to develop social skills'* and *'...helps with life skills'*.

The development of teamwork in relation to PE was mentioned by a number of pupils, *'definitely teamwork'* and *'it helps you develop communication and teamwork skills'*. Coordination also featured as a developed skill, showing an appreciation of motor skill development, *'co-ordination, agility, balance etc.'*

Leadership, people skills and social skills all featured on skill development, with comments such as, *'leadership, team working and growth mindset'* and *'social skills, leadership, working in a team'*. Interestingly the independent school pupils mentioned PE as developing leadership skills rather than the state school and even adding character as an aspect of development, with comments such as, *'character, leadership and sporting skills'*. Maybe this was due to the ethos of the independent school or the social class of some of the pupils, but they were definitely clear about a link between PE and leadership development.

Luke (IS) saw a range of developmental benefits from PE:

*'I think it's just really enjoying yourself, so you can express yourself on the pitch. It gives you a bit of... it's, sort of, like, free time so you can relax from whatever you're doing. It also improves your character. Sport obviously develops everything, and I think that helps to lead to better work elsewhere. So, I think if you put effort everywhere throughout the pitch, then you put it everywhere throughout other parts of life.'*

Thus, from the perspective of Luke (IS), PE was linked to and developed other areas of his life such as character and aided other aspects of his work. James (IS) saw confidence and leadership as something gained from PE:

*'Yes. It's probably given most of the confidence to do other things. You develop your way through a rugby team, and you become a leader in a rugby team. Then you get more involved in lessons, putting your hand up and answering more questions in lessons, stuff like that. It kind of all links in together.'*

The more cognitive side of life such as decision making and resilience were also mentioned as something that develops through PE such as, *'helps with mental skills'* and *'how to think where should I go when playing like rugby and it develops team working'*. Confidence could also benefit if successful with one pupil citing, *'it develops my confidence because if I can do something correctly then I feel better'*.

Robert (SS) thought that resilience would help you improve:

*'Yes, I just keep going and then the more you do it, the more lessons, then the more you start to improve and start to enjoy it. I think that they'd help develop you as like persistent to keep on trying.'*

There was also a social angle to participation in sport and PE that a number of pupils saw as a benefit such as, *‘help develop skills and make new friends’* and *‘it helps develop skills, helps you meet similar people and develops teamwork’*.

Elaine (SS) cited this social angle to sport participation mentioning:

*‘Social side of things, I think. Say, maybe, if you were to join your local tennis team, or something, definitely it’s going to benefit you socially, as well, because it’ll build your conversational skills, and things like that.’*

In general, the pupils suggested quite a wide range of skills that they can develop in PE and a number of these skills were transferable to other aspects of their lives.

### 8.1.2 PE not developing skills

Although the majority felt PE did develop skills some did feel that it did not (see Table 16).

Main Reasons for PE not developing skills	Number of Pupils (n)
Poor lessons in which they don’t learn	12
Behaviour of pupils	3
Differing ability levels in class	2

Table 16: Main reasons for PE not developing skills

For example, they suggested that they did not develop skills due to the standard of the lessons, *‘they don’t teach just tell us what to do (like stuff we already know)’* and *‘could be a bad teacher’*. Behaviour of other pupils in the class also affected learning and development with pupils mentioning, *‘because people always disturb the lesson’* and *‘because people who do nothing ruin it’*. Sometimes this behaviour was linked to pace of the lesson, with one pupil saying *‘because they go at the pace of the slowest person and the better people get bored and mess about and get in trouble for it when it’s not their fault. We spend 1 hour learning how to throw a ball 10 yards’*. Another pupil thought it was not challenging enough to develop skills stating, *‘because it teaches you the basics on different sports so you can take part. That’s it’*. Stress could also cause the lack of development with one pupil saying, *‘just makes my anxiety worse’*.

Some pupils who identified as of higher ability felt that the less able pupils were slowing the pace of the lesson down and as a result it was not a challenge for them. This could then lead to boredom or off task behaviour. This in some respects is a request for setting from the other perspective i.e., from the higher ability rather than the lower ability.

Robert (SS) advocated for pupils of the same ability in a group to help development:

*'However, if you're already at a really good standard in school, obviously there's people going to be in your set who aren't as good, so you're not really going to progress in a PE lesson.'*

Charles (SS) felt that a lack of confidence might hinder progression and development:

*'It depends who's on the team. If it's someone who's a bit less confident and there are people on that team with big characters, that might push them away.'*

Once again linking development (or lack of it) to alignment of skill or in this case confidence.

### 8.1.3 PE and Ability

An interesting finding is that the majority of pupils in the questionnaire rated themselves as having good ability in PE. This could be to do with self-esteem and feeling less critical in self-evaluation. A lesser number agreed that they enjoyed PE and an even smaller number said they did not feel pressure in PE. Thus, many pupils who do not enjoy PE and feel under pressure in PE still rated their own ability as good. More students rated their ability as high in the independent school compared with the state school (see Table 17). This is understandable given that the pupils indicated that the independent school has a prowess in sport which attracts pupils who are good at PE. Pupils seemed more readily to self-identify as low ability in PE in the focus groups or individual interviews. Yet these settings were not anonymous to the group (in the focus groups) or researcher (in the interviews), whereas the questionnaire was completely anonymous. This could, obviously, be due to the nature of selection, but I would have expected this readiness to translate into the questionnaire.

Pupils who rated their ability as good	Percentage
State School	70.0% (n=92)
Independent School	82.6% (n=20)

Table 17: Percentage of Pupils who rated their ability as good

Boys were more likely to state that they strongly agreed that their ability was good and girls were more likely to say their ability was not good (see Table 18).

Gender and Ability Level	Percentage
Boys thought their ability was good	76% (n=80)
Girls thought their ability was good	63% (n=31)
Boys strongly agreed their ability was good	29% (n=31)
Girls strongly agreed their ability was good	10% (n=5)
Girls thought their ability was not good	14% (n=7)
Boys thought their ability was not good	7% (n=7)

Table 18: Gender and Self- Identified Ability level



Although both genders have higher percentages stating their ability is good there is a discrepancy between genders, with boys having a higher perception of ability than girls. This could possibly be due male cultural hierarchy where sport has high status so is this a conscious or subconscious attempt to link to that higher status?

The main reasons cited for rating themselves as good ability in PE were:

- 1) Good skill level (n=33)
- 2) Effort and trying hard (n=23)
- 3) Participation in sport outside of school (n=12)
- 4) SET 1 (n=6)
- 5) Enjoy (n=6)

Those who cited good skill level clarified with explanations such as, *'my ability in PE is strongly agreed as I have been around sport mostly all of my life and I am good at adapting to different scenarios'*. Being good at sport seemed to be an indicator of esteem with many pupils quite comfortable to state this such as, *'I play many sports and am good at them'*.

Effort and trying hard were also seen as synonymous with rating ability as good with comments along the lines of, *'I feel I put 100% effort in for a PE lesson as it is my favourite lesson and I want to make sure I am always 100% fit'*.

If a pupil participated in sport outside of school, they also saw that as an indicator of good ability in PE clarifying answers with, *'because I do football outside of school'* and *'as I play sport in and out of school several times a week'*.

Extrinsic accolades like being in the top set or sporting achievements were also seen as an indicator of good ability with pupils asserting, *'as I am chosen for sporting teams'* and *'because I am one of the best in SET 1 at every sport'*.

It was also apparent that being in a set with a similar ability grouping and being with friends could also make pupils feel they were of good ability in PE, *'because in the set that I'm in now I feel more confident being against my friends and that makes me work harder'*.

The main reasons why pupils rated themselves as lower ability were:

- 1) Not good skill level (n=6)
- 2) Lack of effort (n=3)
- 3) Health (n=2)
- 4) Comparison with others (n=1)

The principal reason for not judging themselves as good ability in PE was skill level, *'in some games I feel that I am weak-average and there aren't many games I feel I am good at'*. However, even if they felt they were good at one sport but not others they still had a tendency to rate themselves as not of good ability in PE with comments such as, *'I am good at swimming but nothing else'* and *'I do struggle in some sport but not all of the sport I am bad at'*.

Pupils also judged themselves as not of good ability due to not trying hard or putting in effort, *'because I'm not sporty and don't try'*. Trying was also linked to enjoyment with one pupil stating, *'no one really tries that hard and I think it's because the lesson isn't enjoyable at all and not fun'*. Therefore, once again effort was synonymous with ability but in some instances, this is not intrinsic but attributed to lesson environment created by the teacher.

Health also appeared as an inhibitor to ability with clarification on not having a good ability such as, *'I am extremely unhealthy and out of shape'*. Even if pupils felt their skill level was high, a lack of fitness could make them judge themselves as having a lower ability, *'I have good skills in PE but I'm not physically fit'*.

One very interesting comment centred around how one pupil (IS) viewed their self against other pupils and the affect it had upon them, *'there are an excess number of sporty people in my school which overshadow slightly below average people'*. Thus, judgement could be relative depending on the overall ability of the group. This is a form of social comparison which in turn can have a negative impact upon self -image and self- esteem, resulting in feeling lesser in comparison to others. In this instance, not feeling as good ability-wise in PE in comparison to 'sporty' pupils.

Indicators of ability varied across the interviewees. It was related to mindset, according to Elaine (SS):

*'Yes, I'd say I'm good at sports, but it tends to be to do with when my mindset is right.'*

Such mindset links to other themes as it could feature in mental health and pressure as well as influencing participation.

Luke (IS) saw performance depending upon enjoyment leading to effort:

*'I think you're not going to perform as well as you can if you don't enjoy it because if you enjoy it, then you put all your effort in, but if you're not enjoying it as much, you won't put as much effort in.'*

Robert (SS) concurred with enjoyment being a factor but also indicated a link between ability and choice:

*I'm set one, and it depends what sport. If it's swimming, I've swam all my life, so I enjoy swimming. But if it's hockey or rugby, I'm not very good, because obviously I just don't enjoy it'.*

The importance of teacher praise was key to Elaine (SS) with regard to judging her ability level. She spoke of the impact that it made on her:

*'I like the fact that I can get, like, a good... Maybe there's a compliment off the teacher at the end. We used to do, like, "Oh, so, the star of today was so-and-so." I used to get that quite a few times. That always made me feel good because it was, like, I've stuck my head in, and I'm not the smartest person in the year, but they've seen that I do have this ability, just because I've stuck my head down.'*

Conversely, if a pupil receives some negativity about performance from a teacher it could have the opposite effect.

There was an acceptance from Robert (SS) that school teams are picked on ability although acknowledging that it may not be universally acceptable, *'Yes, I think it's chosen fairly. They pick for best ability. They don't really think of anything else, so that could upset a few people...'* He also felt that the teachers had high expectations in PE, *'So we've got three lessons over two weeks, and it's quite a high tempo, and they'll expect a lot from you.'*

Edward (SS) described himself as of low ability in PE. His reasoning tended to be in comparison to the image he had of what constituted someone of high ability:

*'I'm not very able in PE. I'm a lot more... I just tend to stay at the side or not get involved, because I'm not the right shape. I don't fit the stereotypes of being sporty. I'm just kind of, meh. I'm a bit mediocre.'*

Michael (IS) felt that his disability was not as widely understood as other disabilities. This meant he was given fewer opportunities and encouragement:

*'Whereas if you're like me and have just got something like dyspraxia, for instance if you're in a wheelchair there are all these opportunities for different sporting things more so than if you've got something like dyspraxia because it's in the middle and it's not really known about as someone that needs to be encouraged.'*

Karen (SS) and Robert (SS) both alluded to the fact that pupils who considered themselves of higher ability would not want to be affected negatively by pupils of lesser ability. When speaking about his swimming club, Robert (SS) remarked:

*'And then for the swimming, there's loads of squads, so obviously that's ability, again, so you're not getting held back.'*

When speaking of school sports teams Karen (SS) felt some saw ability as paramount to participation:

*‘[Sports Teams] I feel like with some of the girls, and boys, it’s about winning. So, they wouldn’t want someone of lesser ability to, say, stop them from winning’.*

Thus, two examples of higher ability pupils having a desire to perform with pupils of a similar ability and not lesser able as they may be detrimental to development or pursuit of winning.

**8.1.4 School Support for less able pupils**

The pupils in the independent school were more likely to think that less able pupils were supported (see Table 19). This could be because there was the perception that low ability were given some form of choice in PE (see Chapter 5).

School Supports less able pupils in PE	Agree (%)
Independent School	78% (n=18)
State School	34% (n=45)

Table 19: Percentage of pupils who feel their school supports the less able

Analysing by gender and examining the state school alone, then males and females showed no difference in whether they felt the less able were supported, 34% of both genders thought the school did not support the less able and 34% also thought the school did support the less able. What does seem consequential, is that if pupils identified as less able or did not enjoy PE, they were more likely to think the school does not support the less able. 64% of pupils who do not think their ability in PE was good, think that their school does not support the less able, compared to 21% of pupils who thought their ability was good thinking that the school does not support the less able. It seems apparent that those who were less able were more likely to feel they were not supported, and they are best placed to make that judgement. However, even a fifth of pupils who were deemed high ability felt their school did not support the less able.

Pupils interviewed did raise the lack support for the less able with some feeling that the high ability received most support. Ann (SS) reported that:

*‘I feel like they support the people that are better at it than not, because if someone’s good at sport, they want to push them so then they can compete in competitions, where if someone’s not very good at it, they’ll just get put in a lower set and they’re not really thought about as much, I feel.’*

Thus, the drive to win and compete outweighing the needs of the less able to develop. Although Elaine (SS) thought support was slightly more equal, she did feel some teachers favour higher ability:

*'Well, honestly, I would say equally. I think, as a school, it tries to help, but I think with, say, maybe some certain staff, they might focus a little bit more on the people who are more able, than help the ones who are less able, which doesn't seem to make sense. You'd think, "Well, if so-and-so can't do it, then why don't you help them, and make them better at it, or even just give them a bit more of a push?"'*

Michael (IS) spoke of personal experience of lower ability being less involved:

*'For instance, for the rugby team wise, because I wasn't ever good at rugby because I can't even catch a ball, I automatically got put in the D team and often ended up not playing anything, so I wasn't then involved.'*

He felt that teachers striving for winning teams created this lack of inclusion:

*'I can understand because they want to win the matches but at the same time, all these people that then get put on the D team are not getting the same exercise as all the other people that are in the A team. The people in the D team might need the exercise. It's not as inclusive probably.'* (Michael, IS)

In another experience Michael (IS) explained the total neglect of the lower ability:

*'When I was in Year 7, everybody was forced to go to do rugby and half the time we'd end up doing stuff and the other half, to be perfectly honest, we ended up sitting on the grass watching them play. When I was in Year 7, I used to have grass fights with all the other people who weren't playing.'*

It would be hard to imagine any other area of the curriculum where less able pupils suffer such neglect. In maths pupils do not watch others calculate sums, so why does this happen in PE? Michael's (IS) comments imply that if pupils are deemed to be less able, they can be side-lined from early on in their secondary school career and become invisible.

Karen (SS) contrasted how the difference in teacher attention to able and less able pupils when sets are mixed together. She mentioned that:

*'... sometimes I feel like if- like I was saying, set one is mixed with a lower set, I feel like set one get more attention because they're better at it and they know how to do it. Whereas, sometimes, the people with lesser ability get pushed aside.'*

Once again in the glare of the higher ability pupils, the less able become invisible. Karen (SS) also speculated another reason for this side-lining due to the perception of the teacher:

*'Because I just feel like the teachers think that the people that can't do it don't try, but maybe sometimes it is because they don't have the ability to do it.'*

Elaine (SS) alluded to the censure faced from other pupils and felt this was caused by the attitude of the teachers. She stated that:

*'The students wouldn't, sort of, see people as more able and less able, if the teachers didn't. I think it comes from the teachers. Like, if the teachers didn't pick on people who are less able than more able, then neither would the students, in that sense.'*

Favouritism by teachers towards the more able pupils was also an issue to some of the pupils. Karen (SS) noted that:

*'So, the girls' netball team, I feel like when they're in PE, they get more advice, or they get treated nicer than people who aren't necessarily in one of the school's teams.'*

She also felt the higher ability were given a veto by the teachers when it came to school teams:

*'You could trial, but I don't know if you would because it... I think the PE teachers, as well, would ask the girls if they wanted somebody else in the team, and they wouldn't want the standards to drop off the team.'* (Karen, SS).

Charles (SS) also felt there was a bias towards ability in school teams:

*'[School Teams] Sometimes it's based on your ability because sometimes people won't put all the effort in at training but still get played in a match situation, say. Whereas there might be others that aren't as good but put lots of effort in and maybe deserve to play on a team.'*

Elaine (SS) felt the bias was demonstrated in attitude shown towards pupils of different abilities and how they were respected and spoken to:

*'So, say we had someone who's really athletic, does all the sports, they might be, like, "Oh, will you come and do this for me? Will you come and do this?" whereas the other person might be, like, "Oh, just do that for me,".'*

Overall, many pupils stated that teachers should support the less able more, Ann (SS) felt that would be more beneficial:

*'because if someone already has that, like, inner drive to do sport, then they don't really need someone pushing them, but if someone's not willing to participate, then it would affect them in the future with health and stuff. So, if they're pushed, they might find out that they enjoy it, so I think it's quite important.'*

However, although Frank (IS) agreed that teachers do not help the less able he did think some less able do not want to be helped:

*'It's not like they don't care, but it's just that... I have to admit that I don't really care. More focus has been put on the people who are better. They've been, sort of, improving. Admittedly, I don't really want to improve, but I just*

*think that it would be better to have a bit more focus and time, especially lower down the school, from about five up to, like, nine.*’

This attitude could have been forged through his experience of neglect and subsequent invisibility as a less able pupil.

There were contrasting voices in the debate around support of the less able. Luke (IS) linked pupils not enjoying PE to the ability of the pupil:

*‘but I think some people may not enjoy it as much, possibly because they’re not as good at it. So, possibly because they may enjoy other parts of society, like music or such, just because they succeed in it.’*

James (IS) implied less able could adjust expectations of PE:

*‘But for other people, like less sporty ones, I’d say they just use it as a break from the exams.’*

Edward (SS) who identified as low ability felt he was given support:

*‘Personally, I don’t enjoy PE. I’m not very athletic. But I do PE in school, and it tends to be quite interactive. I’m doing swimming at the moment. I can’t swim, but Mr X’s quite out there. He helps a lot.’*

He also stated that all pupils received support:

*‘Well, we have sets, so the most able are supported in their way, and the least able are kind of helped and they’re supported in those. So yes, I think we do support everyone.’* (Edward, SS).

This does suggest that away from the glare of the high ability, when the low ability are together in one set, they then become more visible and do receive more support.

### **8.1.5 Ability Setting**

The questionnaire survey, focus groups and some interviewees suggested that the less able were more likely to think that they were not supported. However, Edward (SS), a self-identified lower ability pupil, who thinks that PE should be optional, (*‘But I personally don’t enjoy it, so I think it should be optional, kind of not as compulsory as PE is’*) feels that he does get support, when pupils are in ability sets.

Robert (SS) also thought that all pupils were supported, and he based that upon the ability of the teaching the lower sets:

*‘I think that they support all abilities, really, because there’s just as good a teacher in the bottom set as in the top set to help push them and support them.’*

Many of the pupils whether they were of high or low ability offered a solution to ability issues- setting based on PE ability. Oscar (IS) had a differentiated approach:

*‘So, each teacher would be with a different group, and that group would be tailored on your ability really. So, that PE lesson can be structured or tailored to how able, or not so able you are, at that chosen sport.’*

James (IS) also thought keeping people of similar ability together would help:

*‘because there is always a group in the gym for the ones that aren’t in the fixtures, and they are interacting with each other, and all developing with each other at the same rate, rather than being put in the A team training where they wouldn’t get anything out of it. They train with people at their own level.’*

This theme was continued in Michael’s (IS) interview:

*‘...we now go off to the gym and we do multi-sports. We’ll occasionally do basketball and hockey and things, which is much more inclusive because they’re all people of roughly the same ability now.’*

Robert (SS) felt setting was important to pace of learning, *‘...if you’re getting held back or getting pushed too hard’*. He linked ability setting to choice and to development:

*‘Probably the sports you get to choose inside of school, because if you’re doing football, 20 people could like it but there could be 10 that don’t. And then obviously they’ve got to be on a team, so it’s like kind of holding you back really.’*

Michael (IS) gave an example of what he thought was good practice in sport outside of school, a more individual approach to development and competition. He explained:

*‘I play badminton occasionally outside of school. My coach, I do one to one lessons with him, and then after a while I do matches with certain people. Because he is working it out, he will pick somebody who I can play against, not somebody who is just going to beat me or not somebody who is just going to not play.’*

Such parity of competition and ability was seen as important to both high and low ability pupils for their learning and development in PE.

#### ***8.1.6 Is there a link between PE and becoming an elite athlete?***

For a career in accountancy, the foundations for development in that career can be linked to the maths undertaken in school. Thus, it follows that it is possible for PE to support the development of someone as an elite athlete. 49% of all pupils thought that PE does help someone to become an elite athlete.



An analysis of the results of the state school alone demonstrates that more females than males thought PE would help them become an elite athlete. 55.3% of females and 36.3% of males at the state school felt PE would help them to become an elite athlete. Many traditional male sports have well-established clubs and academy systems outside of school, for example in football, and as such this experience could possibly influence pupils to see that as the route to development of a career with maybe school as a lesser contributor.

The independent school pupils were more likely than the state school to view PE as a development tool for a career in sport (87% v 43%). The independent school did have established connections with a local professional rugby club. In rugby there is a tradition of professional clubs working closely with independent schools to support progression towards a career, and pupils may see development in school as the key support to improve and progress in rugby.

High ability pupils were more likely to think PE would help someone become an elite athlete compared to lower ability (50.4% as opposed to 21.4%). Once again this is probably due to how the children see their own performance and includes their own aspiration with someone that identified as high ability more likely to be planning a career in elite sport and therefore using PE as part of that development.

The main reasons why PE would support development to become an elite athlete	Number of pupils (n)
training/practice/skills	49
opportunity and introduction	16

Table 20: The main reasons why PE would support development to become an elite athlete

Practice and training were the main reason given for PE supporting elite athlete development (see Table 20). Examples to support this practice dimension were given such as, *‘because if you keep on doing sport you will develop skills and might become an elite athlete one day’*. PE could also be the introduction to a sport that people then pursue with one pupil suggesting, *‘because they might enjoy it and join a club outside of school’*. There was also some realisation that you need to start early in pursuit of an elite athlete career and thus school could be crucial, *‘as if people don’t learn the skills at school, it is very late to learn afterwards’* and *‘developing skills at an early age and getting exposure to scouts’*. The latter comment also demonstrating the strong link between elite sport and the independent school. These opportunities created by PE in school were quite apparent from pupils in the independent school such as, *‘most definitely as most pros and elite sportsman come from school as schools can get you up to the high standards of your sport due to nominations for example the DPP rugby development programme’*.

Frank (IS) felt there was a strong relationship between school sport and becoming an elite athlete. He felt the school gave them visibility and reported:

*‘I know people who’ve been, like, playing in rugby matches, or football matches, and then the people from, like, [professional rugby club], or [professional football club], they’ve all found them, and now people are going into*

*professional contracts with these teams. That's because of the help from the school, to get them playing so people can see them.'*

Luke (IS) alluded to the link between school and elite athlete development being more linked to rugby. He felt:

*'I think it's because rugby is not as big of a sport as football, so there's more of a link between each place. I think the school will... I think because the rugby, you analyse... we'll play games with school and they'll send them off to the rugby academy so they can watch and see how to improve, but I think with other sports, there's a bit of a difference because I don't think the school- because I think it's quite a high expectation in football, so they just focus on your academy games because you don't play as much with school. With rugby and cricket, you play quite a lot everywhere'*

Ann (SS) spoke of a netball club opportunity created via school, she explained:

*'Through a teacher, they asked if we'd join the club on Saturdays, so quite a few of us went to that.'*

### **8.1.7 PE and a job or career in sport**

Participation in sport outside of school is a major factor in considering a career in sport (see Table 21).

<b>Pupils considering a job/career in sport</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>
Pupils who participate in sport outside of school	33.3%
Pupils who do not participate in sport outside of school	5.3%

Table 21: Pupils considering a job/career in sport in relation to those who participate in sport outside of school

The contrast is quite stark between those who participate outside of school and those who do not. However, those who do participate outside of school by nature may be more interested in sport and also possibly more able as they have more development time. Thus, they consider themselves in a better position to pursue a sport career than the children who do not participate.

If the sample is controlled to just focus upon the state school, it emerges that there is a gender difference in relation to a career in sport with 22.5% of males and 12.5% of females considering a job in sport. Nearly twice as many males seeing sport as a career pathway, which could reflect the predominance of male sport in society.

There was also a difference between school types with 39.1% of the independent school considering a career in sport compared with 18.6% in the state school. The independent school appears to be part of the structure of player development for rugby so that creates more opportunity at a school level than is apparent in the state school.

Pupils identifying as high ability were more likely to choose a career in sport at 29% rising to 50% for those strongly identifying with high ability. This contrasted starkly with 0% of those identifying as lesser ability thinking of pursuing a career in sport. This seems quite logical as in most subjects if you are good at it or feel you are good at it, you are more likely to see it as a future career than if you do not feel you are good at something.

Although the more glamorous side of sport jobs as in a professional sports player were popular these tended to be tempered by reality, with pupils citing examples such as, *'I would consider being a football player or a PE teacher'*.

In her interview Elaine (SS) summed up quite well the thought processes that young people go through when weighing up a career in sport against another career. She stated:

*'I've always liked the idea of going into a physical sport, like, for a job. Again, I've thought about money, and when I've spoken to, say, my mum about it, they've said with the education... I'm not smart, but with the knowledge I've got I could go further than just doing something in sport. I've looked at, say, midwifery as a different thing, and that's probably going to be a lot more beneficial than going into something with sport.'*

## **8.2 Discussion**

### **8.2.1 Skill Development**

Pupils did see PE as something that developed them. Obviously, most who thought this cited sport skills and improving in particular sports. This could be in part due to the curriculum being dominated by traditional games-related sports (Chorney, 2011). According to Penney (1999), the PE curriculum in many countries does not support the overall development of pupils and in fact should focus on the education of pupils through and in, physical activities and contexts. She argues that activities in PE should be linked rather than delivered in isolation with the aim of improving psychomotor abilities (ibid).

However, some pupils signalled the enhancement of social skills with PE tending to be undertaken in groups and teams. Friendship and socialisation were key areas of development from undertaking PE, especially for females as Elaine and Karen (SS) indicated. This was seen as a positive development from participation in sport and one identified by Bean and Forneris (2016). This could imply the social capital imbued in social skills was crucial to trade with others in the teams (Bourdieu, 1986; 1990) and thus were seen as integral to participation. In the interviews it was the females who were more likely to mention friendship as a reason for participation in PE and studies have suggested this is a key element of female school experience (McRobbie & Garber, 1975; McRobbie,

1991; Griffiths, 1995; Hey, 1997; Kehily et al., 2002). Socialising does appear to be a motivating factor for pupils with regard to participation in PE and sport outside of school (McRobbie, 1991; Chen, 1996; Smith, 1999). Eime et al (2013) concluded that participation in sport does enhance psychosocial development and team sports in particular improve social interaction. However, Elaine (SS) did also speak of the negative effect of being outside of friendship groups, especially if they were the 'sporty girls'. This 'sporty' group held the power through physical and social capital in PE (Bourdieu, 1986;1990; Sullivan, 2002) so could theoretically help and protect their friends but also exclude and censure those outside of their group. Thus, friendship could be a detractor as well as a facilitator of positive experiences for females in PE (Hills, 2007).

James and Luke (IS) described a number of transferable skills developed through PE. These included confidence, character and leadership. They spoke of leadership learned on the sports field being translated into other settings. PE can be a vehicle to develop leadership skills (Vierimaay et al, 2017; Opstoel et al, 2020) and has a positive impact on leadership (Wright and Ding, 2010; Opstoel et al, 2020). This link seen by these boys could be to do with habitus, that their backgrounds predispose them to see leadership as part of their development (Bourdieu, 1986). The fact that they are able in PE is also a contributor as they gain self-worth and self-esteem from this and it is more likely to make them feel they can lead. It could also be part of the social capital that they can contribute and trade within their team and thus gives them an importance and status (Bourdieu, 1986). Leadership was only mentioned within the independent school but not in the state school as a skill developed in PE. Maybe the habitus of the pupils in the state school is less predisposed to seeing themselves as leaders as their experience of the key people in their lives is not on a leadership trajectory and thus, they do not see themselves in this vein. Environmental influence in schools can be a critical aspect to leadership development in pupils (Soderberg, 1997). Therefore, this could be due to the habitus of the pupils formed in part by the ethos of the schools, with the independent school preparing pupils for leadership roles in society (Bourdieu, 1986). It was notable that it was only high ability pupils in the independent school who mentioned leadership. It could be that less able pupils may have low self –worth and self-esteem in PE and thus do not feel they have any capital to trade so will not be seen and do not see themselves as leaders in this field or indeed a modicum of transferable leadership to another field. Whereas high ability pupils gain confidence in PE and this is transferred to leadership and so could be an explanation for why PE (for some pupils) has a positive impact on being a leader (Wright and Burton, 2008; Opstoel et al, 2020). Sport was high status in the independent school and possibly pupils involved in the most important school activities gained the greatest sense of achievement and self-confidence as a result of participation in the high-status activity (Soderberg, 1997). The independent school concept of the ideal pupil blending scholarship and athletics, can influence who in the school will be leaders and who will not (ibid).

James and Luke (IS) felt that the confidence and work-ethic they gained in PE could lead them to do better and be more confident in other lessons, for example to answer questions. This could represent a link between PE and assertiveness and effort (Akelaitis and Malinauskas, 2016; Aksoy and Gürsel, 2017), with Sallis et al (1999) implying that physical activity could have favourable outcomes on academic achievement. This was probably indicative of the enhancement of their self-worth and self-esteem. They saw it being translated into work and also to build character which could be an indicator of the resilience they felt was needed in a PE setting. Fraser-Thomas and Cote (2009) signify that sport is positively correlated with such resilience. Rosewater (2009) found that physical activity can have a benefit academically, intellectually and on brain functions key to learning, leading to enhanced life chances. Chorney (2011) also suggested that systematic PE participation can improve attainment in school overall. For instance, PE can enhance memory and speed up reaction times (Weir, 2008; Chorney, 2011). Shephard and Trudeau, (2008) observed that taking time from academic subjects to give to PE is not detrimental to attainment in those subjects but taking time from PE to give to other academic subjects does not enhance grades and could be detrimental to health. This counteracts the desire of Frank (IS) who felt that not doing PE would be beneficial to his other GCSE subjects (see Chapter 6). The PE link with academic subjects only arose from the independent school and then only from the more able in PE. Given that setting was only boys this finding is in contrast to Carlson et al (2008) who found such academic benefit to be for girls but was neither negative nor positive for boys.

Pupils did in general feel that PE developed skills. This was more prevalent in the independent school than the state school. Maybe the ethos of the school of one with sporting excellence meant they were more likely to see PE as developing key skills. It could also be because the independent school was all boys and in male hierarchy the skills of PE are seen as important (Dunning, 1986) and thus the habitus and social capital of sporting ability were greater there, than in the state school which was mixed gender. However, controlling for gender in the state school does not show any discernible difference. If a pupil participated in sport outside of school or they enjoyed PE they were more likely to think PE developed skills. If someone enjoys something, they probably feel more relaxed and receptive about it and hence probably do learn more. If pupils play sport outside, it is more likely they enjoy PE and are maybe more able as a result, hence they feel PE develops skills. This was magnified when controlling for ability with those citing themselves as high ability far more likely to feel that PE developed skills rather than those who felt they were less able. Hay and MacDonald (2010b) assert that more able pupils get better support and more opportunities to acquire and display skills than that those who were less able so they may actually develop more skills. Maybe their habitus and social capital reflected the PE teachers who put more effort either consciously or sub-consciously into their development (Bourdieu, 1986; Evans 2004; Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). This seems to match with less able pupils feeling not supported in PE and some of the pupils' experiences of describing the lack of teacher support for the less able. It could also be because high quality competition can be seen as the key to success and developing skills (Williams and Krane, 1998; Baker et al, 2003; Sotiriadou and Shilbury, 2009; Syed, 2011). The most important development factor is arguably a sustained period of high-quality practice (Baker et al, 2003), thus, if the

high ability pupils felt they were getting this in PE they would also feel or even see that their skill level was developing and improving.

The types of skills that PE develops were predominantly what you would expect with technique, sports skills and teamwork all being at the top of the list. However, social skills and people skills were also apparent to the pupils. This does fit in with a number of studies suggesting PE improves social and prosocial skills (Holt et al, 2008; Light 2010b; Park et al, 2017; Opsteol et al, 2020) as well as interacting with others (Folletto et al, 2016). Although, this does contrast with many pupils feeling that they are shouted at, judged and humiliated in PE (see Chapter 9) as these are not good people or social skills. Certainly, the positive effect of PE on tolerance as suggested by García-Calvo et al (2016) would be contended by many pupils in this study. Lauritsalo et al (2013) recommended that teaching in PE needed to focus upon pedagogy and pupils' emotional responses. This could well be true as the contrast between the prosocial behaviour that can be developed in PE and the anti-social behaviour, suggested in Chapter's 7 and 9, does insinuate there are two worlds in PE, one where pupils are enjoying the thrill of competition and where there is a strong camaraderie and another where pupils suffer as many are being belittled and judged.

### **8.2.2 Ability**

Of those pupils that felt PE did not develop skills the main reasons cited for this were poor lessons, behaviour of other pupils and differing levels of ability in the class. The first two reasons were a criticism of the powerful agents for not teaching or keeping control. It was a desire to want a different type or a more technical lesson. Children want PE teachers who are inspiring, involved and accomplished (Walseth et al, 2017). The final point of differing ability levels was centred around their peers. This links to the question of setting with a considerable number of pupils in this study having a desire to be in a group with others of the same ability. The main rationale was due to skill development and pressure or judgement (see Chapter 9) and was equally raised from across the ability spectrum. High ability pupils feeling their development was being 'held back' by less able pupils and less able pupils feeling higher ability were not allowing them to develop. Hay and lisahunter (2006) and Hay and Macdonald (2010b) have found that lower ability pupils have concerns about exposing a lack of ability to more able peers for fear of judgement, ridicule and condemnation. Both groups in this study make the assumption that development is best when surrounded by peers of similar ability.

Wilkinson et al (2016) found that 62% of schools in the North East of England do set groups in PE based upon ability. Although ability tends to be the main driver for setting, behaviour, effort, attitude and motivation can influence groupings (Boaler, 1997a; Muijs and Dunne, 2010; Marks, 2012; Wilkinson et al, 2014). Hay and lisahunter (2006) and Hay and Macdonald (2010b) also found that notions of behaviour, attitude and effort form part of the construction of ability when pupils are judged by PE teachers. According to PE teachers in the research by

Wilkinson et al (2016), low ability pupils can be more confident and more likely to participate in PE when it is set on ability. This would give them a safer environment to perform and less likely to undergo censure and hence lead to increasing self-confidence which leads to taking more risks in PE which leads to development of skill level. This is congruent with the findings in this research although the desire from pupils seems to be emerging robustly and to some degree from low ability, as a cry for help and support. However, in other educational subject studies such as Science, Mathematics and English, it was found that setting could be an inhibitor to self-confidence and a purveyor of less motivation for lower ability pupils (Lacey, 1970; Boaler, 1997b; Hallam and Deathe, 2002). These subjects are obviously of a different nature to PE as ability is not constantly on display for all to judge and pupils do not tend to get shouted at by peers for getting a maths sum wrong. Although PE teachers mentioned the benefits of setting to low ability, a smaller number spoke of the benefits to higher ability pupils in Wilkinson et al (2016). This was also very apparent in this study with the perception that their development would be accelerated when competing with high ability counterparts. Syed (2011) was firm in his belief that development was strongly related to high calibre opposition. Thus, this desire by the higher ability may well be rooted in a real benefit for their development. Although Wilkinson and Penney (2014) caution about the equality of opportunity and development for all in setting, and call for more research in this field, many pupils in this study see this as an equality of opportunity to participate in an environment that will enable skill development in a safer non-judgemental manner.

Even though many pupils alluded to issues with PE such as not enjoying it or even feeling downright humiliated by it, the vast majority of pupils rated their ability in PE as good in the questionnaire, which was far less likely in the focus groups and interviews. This is obviously a self-determined measure with no criteria to judge themselves against but their own experiences. However, that said, experiences have formed their feelings and opinions of PE over the years. Although Eva and Regehr (2008) would argue that people do not self-assess well, the reason could also be due to pupils trying to preserve their own self-perception (Lyngstad, 2016). The rationale behind the pupils' judgement tended to fall into two categories, one being good skill level and the other effort and trying hard. It was also hard for pupils to disaggregate this question between different types of sport as you could feel able in one and less able in another. The questionnaire comments and interviewees seemed to suggest that putting effort in equated to being able. Effort and ability can be related especially from people with high esteem (Baumgardner and Levy, 1988). This could also be capital in PE, i.e., someone who is seen to try hard for the team can be seen as having the capital of effort to trade and allow higher ability pupils to deliver the more technical and glamorous side of sport (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, effort alongside ability seem to be acceptable commodities in PE. The powerful agents in the field, the teachers, also value effort which is a commodity broader than PE and pervades education in general. On the contrary pupils could judge themselves as low ability because they felt they did not try or were not in the right mindset.

Pupils in the independent school were more likely to feel their ability was good. This could be because the prowess of the school is rooted in sport and many pupils will be attracted to the school for its sporting excellence.

Independent schools can aspire for their pupils to be the ultimate blending of scholarship and athletics (Soderberg, 1997). It also could be to what one pupil alluded to that so many pupils at the school excel at sport, although he added the caveat that they overshadow the others. This degree of pupils excelling at sport could reflect the esteem of the pupils at the school as Baumgardner and Levy (1988) suggest that high-esteem persons believe that those who expend effort possess high ability. Sport is a high-status activity at the independent school and there is a significant positive relationship between participation in important school activities and self-esteem (Soderberg, 1997).

Girls although more likely than not to say they were good at sport were less likely than boys to say that. It could be to do with male culture feeling the need to be good at sport as part of the masculine hierarchy. Hegemonic masculinity can be central to sport and marginalise those without such traits including many females and also some males (English, 2017). Girls may feel less compulsion from culture and society to feel they need to say they are of high ability due to the dominance of such hegemonic masculinity. Due to male habitus and what is seen as capital in masculine spheres of influence, males could consciously or subconsciously link PE to higher status (Bourdieu, 1986). Hay and Macdonald (2010a) found that teachers and pupils persistently stated perceived differences in ability of males and females. This conception of ability could have discriminatory ramifications on the achievement of girls (ibid) and thus may subconsciously make girls less likely to judge their own ability as good.

External factors also played a part in this self-assessment of ability. This could be based upon the set they were in for PE at school or the fact that they play sport outside of school. Ego orientation can be linked to recognition and status (such as being in SET 1) which is a more extrinsic form of motivation and ability assessment (Zahariadis and Biddle, 2000). Participation in sports especially for boys is likely to increase feeling of self-worth (Soderberg, 1997). Similarly, pupils who participate in the first team at sport can have a higher-than-average self-esteem than those playing for second team and non-athletes (ibid). Although these extrinsic measures were applied by some, the intrinsic measures tended to dominate. Could this be due to the capital associated with PE in male hegemony and the intrinsic desire to be part of this or maybe just simply we tend to overestimate our abilities when self-assessing?

Those identifying as less able were more likely to think that less able pupils were not supported compared with those who self-identified as more able. Across the interviews, pupils spoke of teachers not supporting the less able. Michael (IS) spoke of neglect shown by PE teachers to lower ability pupils who ended up watching the higher ability and even having grass fights to entertain themselves. Ann, Karen and Elaine (SS) all spoke of teachers concentrating on the higher ability and giving them more influence while neglecting the lower ability. These examples suggest that less able pupils can be side-lined from early on (Michael's (IS) example was from year 7), resulting in neglect and invisibility. On the contrary Michael (IS) spoke of them having to watch the higher ability (which does not happen in other lessons) and demonstrates their visibility. The explanation could lie in the habitus of the high ability pupils



reflecting that of the PE teacher who developed in a system that they are now replicating for their pupils (Bourdieu, 1986; Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). On this basis the lower ability do not reflect this habitus and so are side-lined. Why does this happen in PE and not in other subjects? Is it to do with the competitive side of PE, producing teams to win sporting fixtures? English (2017) contends that sport has an excessive focus upon winning and needs to mitigate hypercompetitive attitudes. Ann (SS) thought that this approach is driven by the desire of PE teachers to create winning teams. Once again this reflects the origins and development of the teachers and also their standing across the wider PE community in other schools. Penney and Harris (1997) found evidence that low ability pupils face disadvantage in PE and teachers, pupils, parents and society can reinforce this stereotypical view of PE. To advance sport for everyone more outcomes such as improvement and development need to be taken into account rather than the narrative of winning which is not necessarily an accurate measure (English, 2017).

It seems from pupil responses that teachers can consciously or subconsciously label pupils as elite and non-elite. This can hamper development and lead to frustration (Brown, 2015a). Good practice in PE can be associated with male attributes and this can become the criteria applied to measurement (Hay and MacDonald, 2010a). Thus, talent identification can be based upon physical attributes (Croston, 2013) and gender can undermine some girls in PE (Hay and MacDonald, 2010a). Therefore, judgements of ability can be influenced by social capital and habitus and this influence of societal norms and expectations can disadvantage individuals (Bourdieu, 1984; 1992; Evans, 2004). This can be more apparent for females, as suggested in this study, as non-conformity to masculine ideals can lead to exclusion (Brown, 2015a). However, it could also be the reason why boys are not offered the chance to partake in dance as their PE experience. Soderberg (1997) found that implications loom large for females and male non-athletes in a school where sports are central to school culture. It could lead to pupils pretending to enjoy PE when they actually dislike it, so as to fit in and find favour with the most powerful groups such as high ability pupils and the teachers (Fisette, 2011).

### ***8.2.3 Careers in Sport and Elite Sports development***

Subjects in school tend to be seen as foundations for careers in those fields. Is this the same for PE as a foundation for becoming an elite athlete? 49% of the pupils thought it did and this rose to 87% when controlling for the independent school alone. This discrepancy could be due to the direct link the independent school has with elite sport in terms of a professional rugby team. Thus, they were used to seeing former pupils moving forward into the academies of elite team sport. In a sense the school acted like a quasi-academy for this rugby club with very close ties between the organisations. Pupils spoke of ‘opportunity’ and ‘introduction’ which fits with this transition model. Controlling for gender in the state school demonstrated that girls were more likely than boys to see PE as a foundation to becoming an elite athlete. This could be because the grassroots club structure is well established in traditional male sports as are professional club academies and maybe males see these routes as the foundations for

becoming an elite athlete rather than school PE. Although 49% of pupils in this study saw a link between PE and elite sport, Green (2014) argues that there is a dearth of evidence demonstrating a 'PE effect' and more research is needed in this field. Birchwood et al (2008) suggested that participating in sport may depend on pre-dispositions in early life rather than school PE. These include family culture as well as ethnic/national culture (ibid). Roberts and Brodie (1992) found that the main trait of people in elite sport was that they had been active in several sports throughout their childhood. This fits in with the memoirs of Kenny Dalglish (Dalglish and Winter, 1996) and suggests a role for PE in these crucial years of childhood. There is anecdotal evidence from PE teachers, elite athletes and children to support a causal link between PE and becoming an elite athlete (Green, 2014), with pupils in this study supporting such a link.

Consideration of any job in sport followed similar lines. The Independent school pupils were twice as likely to consider a job in sport than the state school. This once again could be due to the links the school had and the prowess of sport within the school that would attract a larger than normal percentage of sport orientated children. There could also be a socio-demographic, school and class-related link to participation in sports and hence considering a job in sport (Smith, 2006; Birchwood et al, 2008). Participation can relate to social status through parental influence according to Telama et al (1994), so maybe this also relates to career participation in sport. When controlling for gender in the state school, males are more likely to want a job in sport. Is this to do with habitus and the images we see in the media relating sport to males and gives the impression that there are less opportunities for females with regard to jobs in this field? Other factors included ability and participation outside of school making someone more likely to consider a job in sport. This is quite understandable given these children may see this field as a strength or enjoy it and thus it is a reasonable assumption that they want to pursue employment in this field.

#### **8.2.4 Summary**

This theme had more discrepancies than any other between, the independent and the state, schools. This included the types of skills and benefits developed from PE, ability in PE and the link between PE, careers and elite sports development. However, a key area of accord was how best to develop pupils of all abilities. In this area there was resounding concurrence about ability setting. The stories from the less able suggest they can disappear when faced with the glare of the high ability, but they can reappear when distanced from the higher ability through the medium of ability setting.

## Chapter 9. Theme: Pressure

‘Literal Torture’ (IS pupil)

### 9.1 Findings: Pressure

#### 9.1.1 Pressure and PE

The questionnaire survey revealed that considerable numbers of pupils felt under pressure in PE across both schools, with 35.4% (n=46) in the state school and 42.8% (n=10) in the independent school feeling under pressure. This slight disparity between the two schools could be possibly due to the ethos and culture of success with regard to sport in the independent school (as alluded to by some of the pupils) which could potentially add to pressure.

Pupils mentioned their feeling of discomfort in PE, with one pupil commenting, *‘I feel pressured to do sports that I don’t feel comfortable doing. I also feel that sport gets taken very seriously all the time which I don’t enjoy’*.

Another remarked that, *‘I just hate it and it makes me feel uncomfortable’*.

This deleterious reality associated with PE (for some pupils) was also apparent in the interviews with Karen (SS) talking of, *‘quite a negative feeling’* and Robert (SS) speaking of, *‘[Feeling] Just embarrassment, really. You don’t want to really play a sport again. And then you kind of dread PE, which obviously you don’t want to do, but it happens.’*

There were a number of deep emotions about the pressure in PE, one pupil feeling that, *‘I get anxious and other people force you to be good at sport. LITERAL TORTURE’*. This sense of coercion was represented by other pupils with one stating the reason for pressure was, *‘because I am forced to play sports when I don’t want to’*. Such deep emotions were also illuminated in the interviews, with Frank (IS) contrasting a supportive environment with a competitive one very negatively:

*‘I think, in a learning or supportive environment, you’ll be, like, pushed to do better in a nice way, like, “Oh, try and do this,” and people will help you to do better. As soon as you bring it out into a competitive environment people are just, “You’re not good enough. Try harder,” and it’s very morally degrading.’*

A curriculum subject in schools should never provoke feelings of ‘literal torture’ or be ‘morally degrading’ for pupils. Frank (IS) demonstrates quite sophisticated thinking on the importance of scaffolding learning in a supportive manner as opposed to the detriment of a censure-based model upon self-esteem, which blocks self-realisation. The competitive environment in PE is the culprit from Frank’s (IS) perspective.

### 9.1.2 Enjoyment, Competition and Pressure

This feeling of pressure became more profound when comparing with the enjoyment of PE (see Table 22).

Enjoyment of PE	Pupils feeling under pressure in PE (%)
Strongly Enjoy	23.5%
Strongly do not Enjoy	73.7%

Table 22: Enjoyment of PE and relationship to pressure

The less a pupil enjoys PE the feeling of pressure seems to increase. Such pressure could have an effect upon enjoyment and vice versa. In the interviews a link between enjoyment, pressure and competition was also alluded to. Frank (IS) stated:

*‘Some stuff that we do is quite good, and I enjoy it, like games we do. Not like PE games but, like, games in basketball or football, they’re enjoyable, but as soon as you bring it out into, like, a competitive environment, it’s very pressured, and not enjoyable anymore.’*

Competition occurred again and again as a reason cited for pressure. Gary (IS) spoke of high stakes pressure:

*‘We play matches, but you can laugh and joke about it, because it’s not going to affect anything. But with a rugby game outside of school, in training there is not really so much pressure there, but when we’ve got a game in rugby outside of school, there is pressure. It’s the same in school. When we have got a rugby game with school there is pressure as well.’*

Out of school pressure in conjunction with competition seemed very apparent with Elaine (SS) reporting,

*‘Then, out of school... I think, for me, because of it being dance, there’s only, sort of, pressure when it’s competitions, or shows, of just getting it right.’*

Charles (SS) felt more pressure inside of school, *‘Not really for my football team outside of school because that’s not as high standards, but for the school football team, sometimes I feel pressure, yes, because it’s quite, it’s a higher standard that we play at that’.*

This pressure stemming from standard of play was also felt in school by Robert (SS), *‘I think that because I’m quite a high set, I think there’s quite a high pressure for you to perform every time and do really well’.*

Michael (IS) touched on what may be the main driver for pressure at a high standard, the pressure to win:

*‘I’d probably more pressured if I was playing in matches and if my coach had told me that I need to win this, "You need to win this," I’d get pressured into that.’*

Competition seemed to increase pressure on some pupils who disliked the competitive nature of the activity or on others when the standard of peers or play was high.

**9.1.3 Gender and Pressure**

There does seem to be a relationship between pressure and gender, with 49% (n=24) of females and 30.7% (n=32) of males feeling under pressure in PE. However, the independent school had no female pupils so when controlling for this by just examining the state school, these figures increase in disparity (see Table 23).

Gender	Pupils feeling under pressure in PE in the State School (%)
Females	49% (n=24)
Males	27.5% (n=23)

Table 23: Relationship between gender and pressure in PE in the State School

There does seem to be a greater feeling of pressure on females, with virtually half the year group feeling under pressure in the PE lesson compared with just over a quarter of boys in the state school.

The females in the interviews did not specifically talk about more pressure being placed upon them as girls however they did allude to things that may make them feel more under pressure. For example, Elaine (SS) spoke of pressure in terms of:

*‘What are the popular people going to think of me? Are they going to laugh when I get up and try to do this?’ and ‘I think it’s more of, like, a personal sort of thing, where you’ve all got that mindset of, Oh, I don’t know if so-and-so likes me. I don’t know if I do this right. It’s, kind of, a very controlling thing.’*

Karen (SS) also made reference to being around sporty girls although that could be attributed to mixing of sets:

*‘It depends, because- I’m in set one, so set one is split into two. So, if we get joined with the other set one, they’re the really sporty girls, and sometimes you can feel like you’re not as good as them, and they’re judging you, sometimes.’*

Although Karen (SS) does make a link between pressure and high standard of peers, similar to the boys, both females suggest additional pressure to do with social norms. They felt judged, especially by the popular or sporty females which effected their self-esteem and could block their self-realisation.

9.1.4 Ability and Pressure

Contrasting ability with pressure, it appears that the less able a pupil deems themselves to be in PE the greater the likelihood of them feeling under pressure in the lesson (see Figure 14).

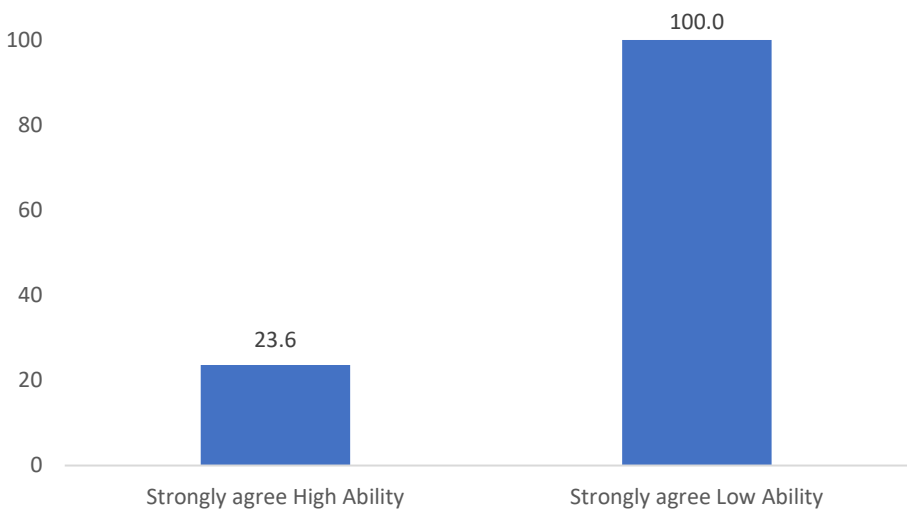


Figure 14: Relationship between ability and pressure (%)

Although pressure was felt by some pupils in every ability grouping it increases as self-identified ability decreases. One reason for this was alluded to by Frank (IS) who indicated it could be due to lower ability pupils being more likely to be shouted at by their peers if they are deemed not be performing to standard. He also indicated that pressure arose from not being able to undertake the activity as well as higher ability pupils. Frank (IS), who self-identified as lower ability when speaking of being shouted at, stated:

*‘I think if it’s happened to me it will happen to other people, and they’ll feel the same way. Obviously, if you’re better at sports then you won’t get shouted at, or if you do it correctly the first time, you won’t get shouted at, and then you won’t have this whole chain reaction.’*

Pressure was also apparent when the children were in mixed ability groups with comments such as, *‘I feel like this because they want so much from you and some people aren’t as good as the top set people’* and *‘because when we are with the higher sets, they are way more competitive than our set’*. Some of the language used when describing the pressure created by unequal ability groupings could be quite emotive for example, *‘if someone is a lot better than me it can intimidate me a lot’*.

Problems with mixing sets were highlighted in the interviews. Edward (SS) felt more pressure with pupils of higher ability, *‘Sometimes we have to mix with the top set. And I would say I feel a lot of pressure to be good, because if we’re not, they tend to get quite angry and a little bit malicious towards us.’*

#### **9.1.5 Reasons for Pressure in PE**

The main reasons cited in the questionnaire survey for pressure in PE were:

- 1) Peer Pressure/Shouting (n=29)
- 2) Internal pressure and self-esteem (n=26)
- 3) Teacher pressure (n=19)

##### *Peer Pressure*

One of the main sources of pressure came from their peers. This usually took the form of shouting with pupils citing, *‘I’m always scared of missing a shot or failing because I know that at least one person on my team would shout at me’* and *‘some people shout at you for doing nothing wrong (people from the same team as you)’*. This pressure tended to be associated with making a mistake and could result in anger of teammates, *‘people have a raji (sic) if you do something wrong’*, or ridicule, *‘because if you do something wrong some laugh’*. It certainly seems to be a judgemental environment, with pupils stating, *‘If I don’t get something right, I feel like I just get judged for it’* and *‘you have to do as well as the sporty people, feel judged’*.

The interviews reinforced these sentiments of being shouted at. Charles (SS) mentioned that, *‘Some people might have a little shout, but usually most of the team is okay about it. I’ll just say, “Try again next time.”*

Frank (IS) linked the shouting to a perceived lack of trying:

*‘If I’m doing an exercise with people who are really good at sport then, yes, they get annoyed, and they say that I don’t care, and that I’m not trying. The thing is that I’m trying, but I’m just really bad at it. Especially in the past they have, like, shouted and said, “Try harder.” I’m just, like, Well, I’m trying my best, but I can’t really do anything about it.’*

Karen (SS) also alluded to the pressure that ‘trying’ causes and the effect of then not trying. She explained, *‘I feel like I just don’t try because I feel like if I do try, I’ll just be judged for it either way. Yes, quite a negative feeling.’*

Charles (SS) explained the opposite effect if peers are more positive when mistakes are made saying, *[being told don’t worry] ‘Just like, Oh, right. Well, there’s no pressure on me next time. I can have another go and it doesn’t matter if I mess up again.’*

## *Self Esteem*

Pressure also arose from a sense of comparing themselves to other people and feeling a sense of inadequacy. One pupil stated, *'I feel I am not good enough compared to others'* and another added *'because there are people better than me who make me feel I have to be better'*. This could negatively affect their feelings with a pupil stating, *'all the people around me make me feel bad'*.

The interviews featured how pupils felt if they were shouted at or compared themselves unfavourably to others and how it affected their development and progress. Frank (IS) talked of:

*'They just, like, said, "You have to do this," and if you got something wrong, they wouldn't, like, shout at you but... Well, no, they did, and you just, sort of, felt a bit hurt. Well, I did. I was just, like, Well, there's no point in doing this anymore....and it would, like, impact my progress.'*

He also mentioned feelings of inadequacy, *'Then, you just feel like you're not good enough, or other people are better than you, which most times they are, but you just feel as if you're not good enough.'*

Karen (SS) echoed these sentiments of inadequacy, *'It makes you feel a bit left out and as though you're not good enough.'*

Consequently, such a damaging impact upon self-esteem can lead to a cycle of self-fulfilling limitation regarding development. Robert (SS) and Edward (SS) were both very clear about the consequences for development and progress of pressure placed on pupils. Robert (SS) said:

*'Sometimes I'll have like a bad shot, and then I'll feel like, "Oh, if I do that again, it's bad." So, you kind of go into a comfort zone. If you do a bad shot in basketball, maybe you won't shoot again until the next lesson because you'll pass it, because you don't want to feel that embarrassment in front of the others.'*

Edward (SS) could see this effect on others, *'Well, obviously, I don't get very upset, but a lot of people feel quite self-conscious, and they tend not to get into the game, or they tend to go somewhere they know they can play instead of trying to push out the boundaries on something new.'*

## *Intrinsic Pressure*

A number of pupils mentioned intrinsic pressure placed on themselves when they undertake PE for example, *'I feel under pressure as I want to impress teachers and other students'* and *'I feel pressure to do well as I do not want to let the team down with poor performance'*.

This internal pressure was mentioned by a number of pupils during the interviews. Gary (IS) felt it was:



*'Pressure to do well. A sort of drive to succeed.' I'd say initially it's me. If I play badly, I am going to let my teammates down. Then, I think that's boosted by my teammates, who are probably also feeling the same thing, and also have that drive to do well.'*

Charles (SS) also felt this pressure of, *'Just not wanting to let other people on the team down.'* Oscar (IS) who self-identified as high ability saw the source of pressure as himself, *'There's often, yes, pressure to perform. So, if you're inspiring to play at high-level, you've obviously got that pressure, but often that pressure is put on by yourself.'*

James (IS) saw this as pressure to be noticed, *'You feel pressure to stand out and show others how to do it.'*

Robert (SS) felt intrinsic and extrinsic pressure. The intrinsic tended to be driven by how other people around him were performing, *'I'd probably say a bit of both really, because I've always had pressure on myself to do well. And then if other people are doing really well, then I'll feel like I should be doing as well as them. So yes, it's kind of a bit of both really.'*

This pressure to do well and shine could be for personal satisfaction and/or to impress peers and teachers.

### *Teacher Pressure*

Teachers can also be a source of pressure for some pupils. Much of the pressure associated with teachers seems to be pressure to do well and perform with pupils reporting that, *'the teacher forces you to do very well'* and *'for example the teacher pushes us too hard'*. Certain PE activities could cause pressure, *'I enjoy it however the PE teachers put on a lot of pressure and when asked to get into partners or teams it is quite nerve racking'*. Although some of the pressure seemed related to what the teachers said to each other, *'yeah because the teachers talk about you'* and to some degree of singling out, *'they expect so much from you and can pick on people which I don't think is right'*. Another form of pressure was to do with undertaking an activity without appropriate knowledge, *'because sometimes you get told to do it without understanding'*.

The interviews also suggested that teachers in school or coaches outside of school could be a source of pressure.

Oscar (IS) who self-identified as high ability in sport, cited pressure from decision makers (i.e., coaches and teachers) if he was not performing. He commented, *'So, if I'm not performing as well as I could be, say, I haven't scored many runs in cricket, I often feel like people are judging, that might impact which teams I play for outside of school and inside of school which may...So, yes, there's obviously pressure to play at a higher level.'*

Frank (IS) spoke of the consequential pressure they faced from teachers and coaches, *'It was just, like, the pressure from the coaches, and all the teachers'* and *'it was very much, "If you're doing something wrong, we will tell you, and then if you're not good enough, you will get kicked out," sort of thing'*.

Robert (SS) felt pressure from the teachers to perform, *'[Teachers] It's like to always work hard and perform to the highest standards. So, if you're having a bad day, they'd still expect you to be really well. And, obviously, we're only human. We can't perform every week'*.

However, Ann (SS) did feel that teachers pushing pupils to perform did have positive dividends. She said:

*'So, with my PE set, there are quite a lot of sporty girls in it, so we've had quite a lot of experiences with different competitions. From Year 7, we've been very, like, pushed to do netball, so because we were so pushed in Year 7, we've been able to do and achieve stuff in competitions when we were older. So, we're quite good at netball and also rugby. We've been in competitions for rugby as well'*.

She went on to say, *'I think it's more enjoyment than pressure'*. Although she did add the caveat, *'It's more enjoyment outside of school because in school, you always have the teachers watching you, but I still enjoy it.'*

Luke (IS) also felt some degree of pressure from teachers/coaches was important for development. He said, *'... because they'll give you sort of, things to improve on at the start of the season. As long as you're improving gradually, they don't mind, but there's the pressure you need to improve, else it doesn't make you a great player'*.

Thus, for some pupils, reasons for pressure can be deleterious, but for others they can lead to achievement, development and satisfaction.

#### ***9.1.6 Reasons for not feeling under pressure in PE.***

The main reasons pupils cited in the questionnaire survey for not feeling under pressure in PE were:

- 1) Setting based upon PE ability (n=13)
- 2) Not bothered or intimidated (n=13)
- 3) Supportive Environment (n=6)

#### ***Ability Setting***

Setting was one of the main concepts that emerged as something that could combat pressure in PE. There were telling comments relating to pressure and setting including, *'if I mix with the top set I do [feel under pressure] but if I stay in my own, no'* and *'when I work in my own set I do not feel under pressure because we are all around the same skill level, however when the groups are mixed, I feel pressured to do better because everyone in the higher groups is better'*.

In the interviews Edward (SS) expressed the difference in pressure when with peers of his own ability compared with those of a higher ability. He reported, *'Well, when I'm with my set, I'm quite a low set, we're all quite*

*comfortable playing with each other. Sometimes we have to mix with the top set. And I would say I feel a lot of pressure to be good’.*

These comments suggest that for some pupils, undertaking PE in an ability set reduces or even eliminates pressure.

#### *Not bothered or intimidated*

The other issues that diminished pressure were not being bothered about PE or not being intimidated by others (which was aided by a belief in their own ability).

Having PE in perspective or not being bothered about it could reduce pressure, *‘because at the end of the day it’s just a game and it isn’t going to affect you if you play good or bad’* and *‘because I’m not bothered if I make a mistake but as long as I learn from it and improve’*. Not feeling intimidated also reduced pressure, with responses such as *‘I don’t care what people think’* and *‘no one pressures me’*. If a pupil had self-belief that could also reduce pressure with pupils commenting, *‘I feel really confident when I’m in PE because I know I’m good’* and *‘because if I get it wrong, I know I’d still be better than most at it’*.

The interviews also demonstrated contrasting views about not feeling pressure due to ability or not particularly rating the subject. James (IS) felt it as advice rather than pressure, *‘No. Sometimes in cricket you might play a stupid shot and get out, and someone might give you a bit of stick. But other than that, it’s not harsh. It’s just kind of general advice really’*. He seemed to thrive on pressure stating, *‘It’s more the pressure situations that you enjoy in sport’*.

On the contrary Michael (IS) did not feel pressure because, *‘Not particularly, no. In terms of me, I don’t see it as that serious. I see it as just a fun thing to do and get healthier.’*

#### *Supportive Environment*

Positive feedback and environment could also alleviate pressure. Frank (IS) talked of the type of feedback that should be given, *‘More constructive. It was very destructive. Like, say, “That was good, but maybe try this, or do this again.”* He also gave an example of dance being less competitive and the result that can have. He reported that:

*‘I felt like, with swimming, it was really competitive, like everyone was for themselves, which is, sort of, the same way in dance, but it’s a bit more team, and it’s not as competitive. In general, there’s just less pressure. It’s more a more supportive and learning...’* The result of this was cited in the following example, *‘No. I know someone who’s got an injury with her leg, that she’s had for a while, and she still does it. No-one shouts. No-one is pressuring anyone. It’s just a nice environment’*.

Karen (SS) spoke of the lack of pressure and being helped in her Dancing Club, *‘[Dancing] No, I don’t think so. I feel like it’s not judged, at all. When I joined, a lot of the older ones helped me, if anything’*.

### **9.1.7 Summary**

When asked in the questionnaire survey if they would like to change anything in PE and sport the second most common response was pressure. This demonstrates the importance of this issue to pupils. It appears that a pupil is more likely to feel pressure in PE the less they enjoy it, the less able they are, and if they are female. However, pupils did provide some solutions to combat pressure such as ability setting and use of constructive feedback.

## **9.2 Discussion**

### **9.2.1 Pressure and PE**

The number of pupils feeling under pressure in PE is very high, with nearly half in the independent school and over a third in the state school. Although, this study does not possess data for other subjects it would be very surprising if they were anywhere near this level. The feeling of pressure in PE has been a thread through all the themes. It can affect both high and low ability and is not the preserve of one group, however they experience it in different ways. The lower ability pupils tend to feel it in the form of judgement, censure, potential embarrassment and humiliation when having to perform in full view of peers. In contrast, the high ability pupils feel the pressure of keeping to the high standards they have set themselves, not letting the team down and even winning.

Although both high and low ability pupils can experience pressure, if you control for ability, less than one quarter of those who strongly agree to have high ability feel pressure whereas one hundred percent of those who strongly disagree to having a good ability in PE feel pressure. Thus, the burden of this pressure is much more likely to fall on the less able although not exclusively. Inextricably linked, especially for the low ability are the main causes of pressure being lack of fun and enjoyment and competition. Children in sporting scenarios can see a focus on winning as a source of pressure and a detriment to enjoyment (Littlefair and Nichol, 2019). When the enjoyment ceases, and the competitiveness begins the pressure builds and their treatment deteriorates. These co-dependents appear to be the causal link as they then create a fertile environment for censure. The feeling of such censure can be felt quite acutely with Frank (IS) describing it as ‘moral degradation’. Deep seated social problems can face children in a challenging social environment like PE such as humiliation, damage to self-perception and bullying (Lyngstad et al, 2016). Many pupils associate PE with negative emotion, embarrassing situations and humiliation (Morgan and Hanson, 2008; Morgan and Burke, 2008; Lauritsalo et al, 2015). This personal experience can affect belief in ability and confidence (Bandura, 1977) and cause permanent damage to future participation (Lauritsalo et al, 2015). On the contrary, the co-dependents of pressure for high ability pupils seem to be the high standard of competition and the drive to win. They conspire to ramp up the pressure on the pupils as they feel the need to perform at such a high level and obtain

the target of victory (Gould et al, 1993; Puente-Diaz and Anshel, 2005). Even at this high ability level the consequence of defeat could be blame and denunciation (Brooks and Magnusson, 2006). However, there does seem to be a pecking order in PE in which those at the bottom are harassed and criticised for mistakes tolerated if committed by highly skilled students (Portman, 1995a). This could be because of their habitus so they look the part of an athlete or the fact they have more social capital and thus this trades away the mistake.

### ***9.2.2 Pressure from interactions***

The findings suggest that the socio-reactions of fellow participants, usually in the same team, are the source of the pressure, so what is the cause of these negative interactions? From the perspective of the higher ability, the less able do not possess any social capital that will aid the team and they certainly do not reflect the habitus of the more able (Bourdieu, 1986). The higher ability pupils need to find mechanisms to come to terms with potential or actual defeat in an activity, as this diminishes their own habitus and social capital by threatening their position in the field, damaging their self-esteem and perception (von Seelen, 2012), and as a result putting pressure on them (Verkooijen et al, 2012). Thus, in order to preserve their self-esteem and status in the field they feel the need to either scapegoat the less able or to attempt to improve the performance of the less able in the manner they associate with PE and sport – shouting. This socio-cultural aspect of sport is played out every weekend in professional sport throughout the country, pupils see coaches and managers shouting at players in an attempt to improve performance and then pundits analysing matches blaming players for mistakes which lead to defeat. Winning on the contrary seems to get you ‘off the hook’ no matter how badly you perform.

PE teachers and coaches are the most powerful agents and the keepers of the doxa (rules of the game) in PE and sport (Bourdieu, 1986). They have also been steeped in this upbringing from a high ability perspective and thus see it as the norm as it reflects their habitus and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, they do not readily check these peer-to-peer exchanges and sometimes add to it with their marginalisation of the less able. Many pupils in the findings suggested favouritism towards, and a tendency to focus on, more able pupils in secondary PE (Penny and Houlihan, 2003; Penney, 2004; Morgan and Hanson, 2008; Elliot et al, 2013). Many pupils also cited teachers as creating pressure with their demands on them or adding to the censure culture. This seems to be when pupils do not reflect their habitus or are not using or possessing any social capital of the PE field such as ability or effort. The style of teaching and instructions in PE can also add pressure on to pupils (Lyngstad et al, 2015). Trudeau and Shephard (2005) found that while highly able girls can be encouraged by teachers, the same teachers can discourage more moderate or less able pupils. This once again links to habitus and social capital and fits in with the feeling of favouritism mentioned by some girls in Chapter 6. Teacher attitudes and behaviours can have a significant impact on pupil alienation from PE (Carlson, 1995).

Pressure on children in sport can also come from parents who make demands of performance or do not protect them from pressure from coaches or bullying from teammates which can lead to psychological injury (Sabato et al, 2016; Kerr et al 2016). Young athletes can experience pressure from emotional abuse by coaches such as shouting, belittlement, criticism or omission (Alexander et al, 2011; Huffington Post, 2013; Mountjoy et al, 2015). Pressure from parents including negative comments can cause stress in young athletes and be detrimental to self-worth (Dunn et al, 2006; Gould et al, 2006; Shields et al, 2007). This element of pressure was only lightly touched upon by pupils with a small number mentioning pressure due to coaches, parents or spectators. The main sources of pressure lay with peers and teachers.

Pupils such as Frank (IS) and Elaine (SS) outlined how positive interaction such as receiving praise, support and constructive feedback can ease pressure and improve development. This can build trust and make pupils feel more comfortable in their environment. A supportive learning environment for children involved in sport is not only more enjoyable but also more developmental (Littlefair and Nichol, 2019). Being under pressure will lead to making mistakes and not attempting higher level skills whereas in a supportive environment less mistakes will be made, and pupils will feel more confident to attempt higher level skills which will help their development and ability (see Chapter 8). Attitudes of pupils to PE can be framed by their feelings which in turn are created by their beliefs (Hagger et al, 2002; Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). Thus, attitude can comprise of beliefs (cognitive) and feelings (affect) (Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). Teachers can create interest in PE among pupils, promote this cognitive component and empower them (Mitchel, 1993; Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). Teachers need to be aware of this cognitive process (Biddle and Mutrie, 1991) as the opposite effect of creating a negative learning environment can cause a long-lasting dislike of PE (Subramaniam and Silverman, 2007). This creates unfavourable attitudes, and these unfavourable attitudes can discourage out of school involvement with PE or sport (Davidson, 1982; Shropshire et al, 1997). Teachers need to have compassion for their pupils as they can contribute to their disengagement (Lyngstad, 2016).

### ***9.2.3 Intrinsic pressure***

Internal pressure was also significant especially with the high ability pupils. They put pressure on themselves to perform to the highest standards. This could be rooted in their habitus and how they saw themselves and could be the main vehicle for the social capital they have with their peers which in their mind may be diminished by poor performances at sport and / or losing in sporting games. The pupils' self-worth can be under threat if they judge their performance to be below their expected standard (Verkooijen et al, 2012). Mouratidis et al (2009) found in a study of Greek upper elementary schools that if pupils have 'ego goals' in sport rather than 'task goals' this can put extra pressure on children. PE does put a strain on self-perception (von Seelen, 2012). There is evidence in studies analysing a range of youth sports that pressure arising from fears about performance, losing and ultimately failure in

their chosen sport can affect the stress levels of elite young athletes significantly (Cohn, 1990; Scalton et al, 1991; Gould et al, 1993; Puente- Diaz and Anshel, 2005).

Pupils can use techniques to hide in PE lessons as they do not want to lose standing in terms of the subject and socially in the eyes of peers and teachers, because losing face is to the detriment of their self-perception (Ommundsen, 2001; Ommundsen, 2004; Ntoumanis et al, 2010). Pupils try to avoid making themselves look foolish to evade the resultant diminishing social capital and standing and thus try to avoid situations that they struggle with to avoid the pressure of performance (Lyngstad et al, 2015). Pupils fear that as a result of demonstrating poor performance they may be bullied or pestered in some way (Lyngstad et al, 2015) and therefore diminishing their visibility by retreating into the shadows can be a self-preservation mechanism. PE teachers should reduce such fear and with it pressure by creating multiple opportunities for success as well as building self- perception and esteem of pupils Ntoumanis et al. (2010).

Habitus and social capital may have been used as a measure by some less able pupils. If they felt this did not measure up to others in PE, then this could be detrimental to self –esteem and hence could be a source of pressure. A number of comments lead to this comparison theory also being played out in the field. If PE is taught badly, it can create feelings of anxiety and inadequacy (Guardian, 2017). Säfvenbom et al (2014), in a Norwegian study, found that 32% of pupils liked PE but did not like the way it was taught. Many pupils in this study also linked the pedagogy of PE to inadequacy and pressure (see Chapter 6).

Some high ability pupils thrived in competitive pressure, linking it to development and wanting challenge through ability setting. This concurs with the experiences of Syed (2011).

#### ***9.2.4 Gender and pressure***

When controlling for gender in the state school nearly half of all girls felt under pressure in PE which was twice the number for boys. Walseth et al (2017) found that girls in particular can worry about doing the wrong thing and letting the team down. There could also be added pressure to do with other issues such as image and appearance as some girls mentioned such as not wanting to spoil their hair or get it wet as Ann (SS) spoke about. Body issues and not being able to hide the body in PE attire can add pressure onto girls when undertaking PE (Walseth et al, 2017) with peer judgement of bodies also applying pressure to girls (Walseth et al, 2017). The visibility of the PE lesson, in terms of both the body and skills, appears to exert both extrinsic and intrinsic pressure onto girls (Fisette, 2011). Therefore, not only can girls survey the cultural capital of physique and skill of each other, but they can also compare themselves (Bourdieu, 1986; Fisette, 2011).

Some girls, such as Elaine (SS), alluded to not getting on with certain groups of girls and this creating pressure in PE, which was something not mentioned by the boys. Once again social capital and habitus can be crucial for position and status within the PE field (Bourdieu, 1986). It could also be because many sports are linked to male physicality as the benchmark and thus as a female it may feel harder to participate on this socio-cultural basis (see Chapter 6).

### ***9.2.5 Pressure and relationship to other themes***

When controlling for enjoyment and pressure it was noticeable that if you enjoyed PE, you were less likely to feel under pressure. Only one quarter of pupils who enjoyed PE felt under pressure compared to three quarters of pupils who did not enjoy PE. Thus, the same conundrum as with participation (see Chapter 6) with the enjoyment factor being crucial for pupils to participate and to feel less pressured. Although the importance of enjoyment emerges in primary prior to secondary school PE (Hayes, 2017), enjoyment however can mean different things to different pupils. This is where choice emerges (see Chapter 5) as if pupils have a choice this can lead to enjoyment which in turn leads to less pressure and participation. More participation and less pressure lead to better health outcomes for pupils and to development. This of course all leads back to enjoyment, so it is cyclical in nature:

Choice → Enjoyment → less pressure → participation → health → development → enjoyment

### ***9.2.6 Pupil Voice solutions for pressure***

It is quite clear from some of the explanations from the pupils about the pressure they face that there are solutions. The main one being setting on the basis of PE ability. Although a lot of educational theory recommends mixed ability teaching as being more beneficial and inclusive (Francis et al, 2017; EEF Toolkit, 2018) the pupils are strong advocates of setting on ability for their classes. They feel much more comfortable with fellow pupils of their own ability around them. They suggest that a lot of peer pressure is due to mismatch of ability and when ability is equal there is less pressure and criticism as everyone is performing at the same level. This discrepancy with research could be that pressure and confidence have more impact in PE than in other subject areas due to pupil visibility, with most research on the benefits of mixed ability focusing upon English, Maths and Science. It appears pupils are more confident to try different skills, as in a set class they are less likely to face criticism if it does not come off. Thus, this then aids their skill development, and their ability will improve (see Chapter 8). Both ends of the ability spectrum seem to advocate setting. The lower end so they do not get criticised and shouted at, and the higher ability as they want to be with fellow athletes that can stretch them and have fellow teammates '*that won't let the team down*'. Many schools do indeed set classes especially when they are in the upper years undertaking external examination



routes. However, this tends to be on academic ability and not physical ability which can result in PE being mixed ability rather than set. Lyngstad et al, (2016 p1129) define self-presentation as, 'processes [are those] where pupils monitor and control how others view them in PE, and self-presentation plays a major role in determining how pupils will participate in the subject'. The social interactions and communications within the PE class regulate such self-presentation which can also be undermined or maintained via these social interactions (Morrison and Nash, 2012). Thus, due to habitus and social capital said social interactions may be more likely to maintain self-presentation in settings of similar ability groupings.

### ***9.2.7 Summary***

The main forms of pressure seem to be peer pressure, teacher pressure and internal pressure. Even pupils who do not feel pressure or are not intimidated acknowledge a consequence for not playing well. The main factors for eradicating pressure, as suggested by pupils, are setting on basis of ability, self-belief and not being bothered or not feeling intimidated.

Although other lessons can have pressure it does seem that pupils experience heightened states of pressure in PE in relation to exposure and visibility. In other lessons it is harder to receive peer pressure as it is not as easy to judge the performance of others and PE has a strong emphasis on team working which other subjects do not have to the same degree. The outcome of many PE lessons i.e., winning in a team game can rest on all members of the team and means there tends to be nowhere to hide. Hence, the ability and performance of each child is exposed and any perceived weak link in the chain suffers at the hands of their teammates. PE more than other subjects, due to exposure and surveillance, does seem to put a strain on self-perception for pupils, in particular, in scenarios when a lack of skill is revealed (von Seelen, 2012).

There are a number of consequences for pupils in this situation. These include effects upon self-esteem, mental health, relationships within the group, participation in the future (and/or outside school) and skill development.

## **Chapter 10. Pupil Voice in PE and the desire for, or coerced, (in)visibility**

‘I used to have grass fights with all the other people who weren't playing’ (Michael, IS)

### **10.1 Participation level of Pupil Voice**

The process of pupil voice in this study is equally important to the outcome of pupil voice through the emergent themes. Indeed, the credibility of the themes rely upon the process being one of true pupil voice and not a tokenistic imitation. Pupils in voice scenarios can feel mechanisms are just gestures and that they are not engaged with or listened to by teachers (Jopling and Riordan, 2021). Involvement of pupils can easily fall into surface compliance (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006) and although good practice does exist often it is based upon consumerism (Biesta and Lawy, 2006). Improving experience and learning for pupils should include engagement (Groundwater-Smith and Downes, 1999) and this method cannot be perfunctory (Groundwater-Smith, 2009). Empowering children through voice gives them visibility. Pupil voice is crucial for teachers to understand the visibility of learning and experience from the perspective of pupils (Hattie, 2009). In order to establish the authority of the pupil voice methodological process in this study, it can be compared against indicators of pupil voice participation. Such indicators have been determined by Fielding (2011), Shier (2001) and Hart (1992).

Fielding (2011) advocates a person-centred model in all forms of pupil voice such as peer support, pupil/teacher partnerships and pupil evaluation. His model is an alternative to neoliberal values and is centred around relational and personal development establishing an inclusive and creative learning community. The typology of partnership ranges from the involvement of pupils as i) data sources, ii) active respondents, iii) co-enquiries, iv) knowledge creators, v) joint authors, vi) intergenerational participatory democracy (Fielding, 2011, p.10-11). Shier's (2001) model has many similarities to Fielding. He devised 'pathways to participation' as a model to action plan and augment the participation of children (Shier, 2001, p.116). His five-level model of participation entails that children, i) are listened to, ii) are supported in expressing their views, iii) have views taken into account, iv) are involved in decision making, v) share power and responsibility for decision making (Shier, 2001, p.111). One difference from Fielding's model is that each level is defined in terms of 'openings, opportunities and obligations' (Shier, 2001, p.111). Although, the main themes of participation in both these models are also apparent in Hart's (1992) model, the major difference is Hart's conceptualisation of non-participation. Hart (1992) created a ladder of participation with 8 rungs, 3 of which were non-participation and 5 which included increasing degrees of participation. The non-participatory rungs were i) manipulation, ii) decoration and iii) tokenism. The degrees of participation were iv) assigned but informed, v) consulted but informed, vi) adult initiated, shared decisions with children, vii) child initiated and directed, viii) child initiated, shared decisions with adults (Hart, 1992, p.8-9).

Comparing and contrasting in relation to these three models can establish the authenticity of this study. Pupils in this study are not just responsive, their voice initiated the research by identifying the themes that were relevant and important to them. They participated by sanctioning and correcting issues linking the focus group, the outcomes of which they drove, and the survey, to their peer group. This reflects classification iv on Fielding's typology with pupils being knowledge creators (Fielding, 2011). This was as far as this study could extend on this typology due to the fact it could not reach joint author level as this was for a PhD thesis which prevented co-construction. Shier's (2001) levels are defined in terms of 'openings, opportunities and obligations' (p.111) which makes it slightly more complex when citing this study on the continuum. In some senses this study matches level 5 criteria as it is about sharing power. The direction of this study was totally dependent upon the thoughts and experiences of the pupils, and it was made clear to them from inception that whatever they thought, felt and expressed was what this study was about, the power therefore lay in their hands. However, they did not have responsibility for this study and did not have the power to construct the research methods, rather they had the power to control the outcomes. Level 4 encompasses decision making powers and differs from level 3 which states only their views are input at that level (Shier, 2001, p.114). However, this study was more than their views, as they had decision making power over the direction of the research from the focus group and the content of the survey to ensure it correlated with their views and all the changes they made were incorporated. This fact positions the study above level 3 and more aligned to level 4. Shier (2001) states that level 3 and above meet the minimum requirements to endorse the UN convention of the rights of the child (1992) regarding involvement and weight given to the views of children. Hart's (1992) levels 7 and 8 required the children to have the initial ideas for the project. While it could be argued that they initiated the project from the findings perspective they did not have the initial idea to undertake this study. Therefore, this prohibits this study matching these levels. In level 6, children have their views considered and are involved with decision making although they were not involved with planning and implementation as is required. In level 5, the project is run by adults and children are consulted and opinions taken seriously. However, children's opinions were the study, and they were involved in decision making so the participation level was higher than level 5. This study has elements of levels 5 and 6 but does not categorically rest within either level, so is situated between such levels.

A strength of this study is that it correlates towards the top in all three models of participation and voice measures, although with the limitation that it is not at the top on any of these measures. It does demonstrate a level of participation congruent with pupil voice and one that endorses the UN convention of the rights of the child (1992). Given that this study is not being devised in a school by an internal member of the school, rather an external researcher with no authority in the school, this is probably the upper limit it can achieve. Equally another limiting factor on the participation level was the fact that the research is a study for a PhD thesis. Thus, it must demonstrate construction and ownership of the author in order to successfully achieve the thesis status.

All these measures of participation have to be adapted for an external researcher working in a school with pupils as opposed to teachers' working with pupils. Although, it is impossible to guarantee the schools will take the views of the pupils into account following their feedback report, I have based the whole premise of this study on their direction and views, so they are preeminent within the study.

## **10.2 Authentic Pupil Voice(s)**

Many children in school are unseen (Pye, 1988; Dagley, 2004) and have 'silent or silenced voices' (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002, p.2). The premise of this study is one of pupil voice. However, pupil voice is not one homogeneous sound, it is varied with a multitude of differing voices (Reay and Arnot, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2015). To hear pupil voice is to hear a range of experiences and subsequently a range of voices. There is not one authentic voice but many authentic voices and these range on a continuum from pupils who really enjoy PE and thrive in its current format to those who despise PE and struggle in the environment. It encompasses pupils who are comfortable and willing to use their voice and those who are not. The environment created was intended to facilitate hearing both clusters. Nonetheless, the themes raised by the pupils have a congruence for all on this spectrum albeit with differing experiences and outcomes.

These themes derived from voice and process of this study being one of pupil voice were equally important. Both are interrelated as the pupils must feel they have freedom of expression with as minimal interference from adult voice in order to produce their true views and feelings. No study of this nature can fully represent true pupil voice, rather it is a balance between mediation and directness. The pupils decide what is true to them, but their view is mediated through myself as a conduit. I am conscious that adults can re-shape pupil language through interpretation (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002) so their findings correspondingly need to be interpreted as purely as possible without adult voice diluting the pupil voice message. However, studies can facilitate freedom of expression and for this to occur and for authenticity, it is crucial to ensure that pupils see participation and consultation as credible (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006). Therefore, a key question is, did the methodological approach and the environment created produce freedom of expression against a backdrop of hierarchical power relations between adults and children in schools (Lemke, 1990; Robinson and Taylor, 2013)? To answer this, it is necessary to look at the interaction during data collection and the subsequent findings produced by the pupils. Is there evidence of freedom of expression or are they more reticent with their thoughts and opinions?

The initial focus groups were the first instance where the pupils met myself as the researcher. I was conscious of having an educational legitimacy through being from a university (Robinson and Taylor, 2013), so I attempted to create a relaxed informal environment reinforcing that there were no wrong answers, that all answers would be respected and requesting that there would be confidentiality within the group and anonymity outside the group. This

was not only to make them feel comfortable and secure in giving their true opinions (Lundy, 2007) it was to reinforce that I was not expecting a particular answer as any answer they gave was ‘right’ as it was their opinion or experience. It also supported the ‘rights’ and ‘respect’ premise of pupil voice (Cook-Sather, 2015). Teachers were not present, so this aided diminished power relation issues (Robinson and Taylor, 2013), with the ‘respect’ and ‘no wrong answers’ agendas moderating power relations between the pupils (Haugaard, 2012; Robinson and Taylor, 2013), producing enhanced freedom of expression. This did yield some strong views and language on aspects of PE, such as how less able pupils were treated in the independent school and lack of choice in a repetitive curriculum in the state school. One pupil stated that in PE lessons pupils ‘...*get forced to do things you don’t want to do*’. It does appear that the nature of their thoughts supplied in these groups suggested they felt a freedom to express their opinions how they saw them rather than a moderated version.

The focus group pupils scrutinised the questionnaire for accuracy and did voice whether questions made sense or if they did cover the themes raised within their focus group. Changes were made as a result of their feedback. The questionnaire survey was delivered in a manner to ensure complete anonymity and confidentiality. Pupils seemed to trust this was the case giving some strong views about the curriculum, delivery models and treatment of certain groups. Some pupils actually named teachers directly when criticising practice, so this suggests they did feel empowered to speak how they felt. In the interviews, confidentiality and anonymity were reassured and teachers were not present. Strong views on PE emerged such as ‘*moral outrage*’ being levelled at the subject and accusations of favouritism by the teachers. Such a response does indicate a consciousness by some pupils of the power and ‘oppression’ of others leading to them feeling freer of their subordinate positions (Freire, 1972; Robinson, 2011).

The ease of criticality by pupils evidenced in the findings suggests that hierarchical power relations were broken down by the method deployed and that the voice that is subsequently heard is that of the pupils rather than what the pupils think the adults want to hear. This reinforces the critical importance and authenticity of the themes that emerged from pupil voice.

Given the authenticity of the data collection, the biggest danger to pupil voice therein lies in the literature and interpretation of the findings. Shotter (1993) warns of the challenges of representing their lives and expressions from their situations with Fielding and Rudduck (2002) cautioning of the author’s perspective in interpretation. In an ideal scenario all adult voice would have been eradicated including that which advocates for pupil voice. However, the nature of academia and in particular a doctoral study prevents such eradication. Therefore, having their voice constantly in mind and trying to promote said voice while being cognisant of adult voice and limiting its influence is the trade-off within this study. To mitigate influence of adult voice in these areas, the major part of the literature review was undertaken after the findings were collated and the theoretical framework was only selected following the emergence of the themes from the pupil voice data (See Chapters 2 and 3). For the reasons outlined, this methodological approach does seem to have encouraged freedom of expression, broken down the hierarchical power

relations in school to allow authentic pupil voice on their thoughts, opinions and experiences (Freire, 1972; Robinson, 2011) and limited, to some extent, the impact of adult voice in literature and interpretation.

The final stage after completion of the study is ensuring their views are listened to and not just heard (Lundy, 2007; Robinson, 2011). A full and detailed report of the findings has been sent to the respective schools (and to pupils) although I have no power to ensure they listen, the reports have been written in a constructive manner which increases this likelihood. It is also a duty to publish the findings of the pupils to bring their influence to bear upon the field and support academia to listen. This thesis is written in accessible language to increase understanding by the audience as will be the ensuing papers, which is a deliberate attempt to aid the voice of the pupils being listened to.

Voice is more than listening and hearing, it is also about seeing and giving attention. Ensuring all pupils in PE are visible is critical to hearing their voice. There is a performance element to PE which encompasses other elements to voice such as feeling. This performance is related to the nature of participation, which is mandatory due to PE being a subject on the school curriculum. Although pupils can select PE as a GCSE option, it is not a subject that they can drop during their GCSE programme. In many cases pupils are happy with this mandatory participation but in some, as demonstrated through this research, this is seen as forced participation and a particularly unpleasant experience. The themes which emerged from pupil voice form the narrative for the overarching concept of the research, which is the nature of their participation with the resultant exposure and the consequent desire for, or enforced, (in)visibility dictated by their position on the PE spectrum (see section 10.3). Much of the PE spectrum is dependent on ability although this ability is not an absolute commodity rather a socially constructed version shaped by the dynamics of social field theory in the PE setting (Evans, 2003; Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). It is not necessarily homogeneous to all PE activities as choice could be a leveller however its interpretation by the most powerful agents can undermine any sense of parity and levelling across pupil groups. This creates the (in)visibility enigma with not only the light fading as the 'lower' ability end of the spectrum approaches but also voice seeming to fade due to the unseen nature of their feelings and experience.

### **10.3 Themes and (In)visibility**

PE is a compulsory national curriculum foundation subject and although both schools do not have to follow the national curriculum (as independent schools and academies are exempt) they do have PE as mandatory for all pupils. Therefore, whether pupils like or loathe PE they must participate. This mandatory or forced participation (as some pupils referred to it) is not an issue for a number of pupils, particularly those of high ability as they expressed many positives about participation, however others in particular those of low ability had grave reservations and some would have not participated if optional. Whether pupils enjoyed PE or not, the way it is delivered, the curriculum on offer and the socially constructed environment have an impact on every one of them (see Chapters 4-9). This impact

manifests itself due to the situational exposure of both body/physique and skill level and can create a desire for or cause (in)visibility among pupils. The desire is intrinsic to the pupils, whereas the cause is extrinsic.

Desire is not the only rationale for (in)visibility as some pupils due to habitus and capital are placed in spheres of visibility and others marginalised into the invisible shadows at the edge of the lesson. This pertains to the social interactions of the lesson, the social construction of ability and a hegemonic masculine culture (Bourdieu, 1986; Hay and McDonald, 2010b; English, 2017). Habitus and capital shape the powerful agents in the field and the beneficiaries of said agents. This can propel some pupils into the limelight and others into the darkness. The disappearance of children in this manner can apply to other groups in school such as the disabled (Tracy and Covino, 2017). PE appears to be another area where diversity is not valued, consigning some pupils into the shadowlands.

Consequently, such (in)visibility in PE can lead to inclusion/exclusion on a voluntary or enforced basis. Hills (2007) found that in girls' PE such exclusion tends to focus upon judgements of bodies, teasing and marginalisation in team games, which is extrinsic with an intrinsic consequence. Such non-inclusive behaviour is not limited to girls and is also apparent in boy's PE (Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). Exclusion can lead pupils to voluntarily seek the shadows of the lesson or even try to avoid the lesson completely. Conversely some seek the 'limelight' as it is 'their time to shine' and may want or even demand visibility. Such (in)visibility can be but is not necessarily a pupil choice. The marginalisation of some pupils and the promotion of others can be dictated by the field and as a result, leads to (in)visibility. Within the visual spectrum of PE some pupils desire (in)visibility and some have (in)visibility thrust upon them. Therefore, (in)visibility is two-fold, being voluntary (desire for) and involuntary (forced) although the cause is not necessarily voluntary in either case.

The themes that they have shared are all interlinked and all augment this overarching concept of mandatory participation and the desire for or enforced (in)visibility. They all affect each other to some degree and also all fuel the desire for (in)visibility within the subject of PE. For example, in the health theme those children who were deemed 'overweight' or PE was detrimental to their mental health were likely to crave invisibility in the subject compared with those who had the capital of a sporting physique and gained self-esteem, who were more likely to enjoy visibility. All the themes translated into aspects of pupils wanting or being placed within (in)visibility categories (see Table 24).

Theme	Invisibility	Visibility
Health	Overweight	Sporting Physique
	Detrimental to Mental Health	Augments mental health
	Unfit	Fit
Pressure	Censure	Praise
	Humiliation	Self-Esteem
Participation	Dislike	Enjoyment
	marginalised	competitive
	Non-hegemonic masculine traits	Hegemonic masculine traits
Development and Ability	Low ability	High ability
	Not developing	Skill developing
Choice	No choice what to do in PE	Choice of what to do
	No choice how to do PE	Choice of how to do PE
	No choice of who to do PE with	Choice of who to do PE with

Table 24: Themes and (In)visibility

Reflecting on the theme of participation as another example, if a pupil disliked PE they may intentionally take themselves to the periphery of the lesson, just going through the motions and staying off the radar of the teacher. However, if they enjoy PE, they may enthusiastically be at the heart of the action, maximising involvement and subsequent visibility. This could also be true for competitive pupils thrusting themselves into the limelight due to their desire but also visibility being bestowed upon them via accolades from teachers/pupils with peers engaging their involvement in a game and wanting them to be on their team. For less competitive children they may shy away from such competition retreating into the shadows or indeed going unseen by others, resulting in them not being noticed by teachers or engaged in activity by their peers. Having a sporting physique and other hegemonic masculine traits can bring pupils in PE to the forefront of the lesson as they demonstrate the perceived key attributes of PE. This can be desired by pupils with such traits but can also be thrust upon them as they symbolise PE qualities in the minds of the powerful agents. Similarly, not having hegemonic masculine traits can create a desire of less exposure, of say the body, and a retreat into invisibility or it can mean others do not see valuable traits in these pupils and they get overlooked and are forced into the darkness of obscurity. These examples are from participation, but all the other themes also reflect outcomes of positioning either voluntary or involuntary on the (in)visibility spectrum.

It appears in this study that some pupils crave visibility (those who gain self -worth and self-esteem) and others crave invisibility (those who face censure and judgement). However, this is not as concrete as it appears and can be much more fluid. For example, the low ability may crave invisibility when mixed with high ability however they would like to be set and, in this scenario, invisibility would not be inexorable, moreover they could uncloak and regain visibility. This corresponds to Wilkinson and Penney (2014) who found that low ability are more likely to participate in PE when in set ability classes. However, research on ability grouping in education such as streaming,



banding and setting, has demonstrated that it does not have any significant benefits and indeed has disadvantages for low-attaining groups (Ireson et al, 2005; Francis et al, 2017; EEF Toolkit, 2018). The research focuses upon academic subjects and not PE but does highlight the negative impacts upon pupils in low ability sets (Ireson et al, 2005; Francis et al, 2017; EEF Toolkit, 2018). In this study, high and low ability pupils were advocates of such ability setting in PE for differing reasons. However, it was the low ability who were more vocal about the desire for such a scenario and the benefits that would bring to their development and situation. This is contrary to research which at best, suggests setting can give small academic benefits to high attaining pupils whereas at the same time conferring large disadvantages for low ability (EEF Toolkit, 2018). Of course, the research is based upon academic subjects and PE may indeed be an exception. It could be that pedagogical methods need to change, and diversity needs to be valued to make the invisible, visible (Tracy and Covino, 2017). However, this is a pupil voice study, and their voice was unequivocal about ability setting being the key to regaining visibility.

The other uncloaking device proposed by pupils was the choice of physical activity, as if they were participating in something more enjoyable that would aid confidence. In turn this would increase self-esteem which involves beliefs about self-worth (Hattie, 2009) resulting once again, that they could regain visibility. Choice was three-fold, being about activity, how to do it i.e., competitive or not, and who to participate with. In such circumstances, participation, although still mandatory, would not seem forced. For example, Michael (IS) enjoyed badminton outside of school on a one-to-one basis, for fun with a friend. He was the first pupil to raise the issue of choice in this study, so if badminton was offered in school on this footing, then he may have had a different perspective on PE and would not have found it to be 'forced' or had the desire to be 'invisible'.

In this study pupil voice represents a range of experiences, as suggested by Reay and Arnot (2002), and the overarching concept of coercion or the desire for (in)visibility also reflects this spectrum. The strength of desire or coercion in either direction on the spectrum is affected by habitus, capital, powerful agents and experiences. All the themes identified by the findings play a role in shaping this visual spectrum. Some pupils such as Frank (IS) (who found PE to be 'morally degrading') and Edward (SS) related invisibility to a desire for non-participation. However, this is nuanced and not straight forward as they both liked certain physical activities such as dance and cycling. Therefore, given the desired choice of activity their desire for invisibility and mindset regarding forced participation would have been different. Choice was also perceived as a freedom, preventing negative experience and indicating a desire to engage in the subject. Fielding and Rudduck (2002) concur that, 'pupils do wish to have more choice about what they learn' (p.2). It was a solution put forward by pupils whether they deemed themselves to be low or high ability. For the low ability who are more likely to face censure (Portman, 1995a; Lynstad et al, 2015) this freedom of choice was linked to pressure as they perceived this would reduce if choice was available. Likewise, participation would improve if choice was available and pressure was less, as this would increase enjoyment, and participation was strongly correlated to enjoyment (Chapter 6; Prochaska et al, 2003; Smith, 2006). Enjoying participation rather

than coerced participation would aid development and health as PE contributes to health (Quennerstedt, 2019) with enjoyment preventing mental health compromise and partaking in PE developing skills (Opstoel et al, 2020). Concurrently running throughout these themes was the pupil suggested panacea of ability setting, which was a key solution at both ends of the ability spectrum. This would enhance the desire for visibility for less able pupils as they felt more comfortable and less likely to face censure and resultant pressure. They also would have more involvement in a game and feel less marginalised by dominant high ability pupils as Hills (2007) found is the case with mixed ability classes. For more able pupils it was about development and challenge and being stretched by able peers, with their drive to aspire to higher achievement. Either way visibility becomes a greater desired commodity in the process.

Pressure, choice and development and ability could all affect the view of participation and desire for (in)visibility. Depending upon if these were apparent, to what degree and the directional vector, they could influence the view of the pupils. This in turn could affect the health benefits of physical activity. Virtually all pupils understood such physical health benefits but, the situational relationships congruent with the themes and ability setting dictated engagement to access such benefits. Mental health benefits were conspicuously placed in either a positive or negative scale depending upon the themes and ability setting scenarios. Although literature tends to reflect that PE can improve mental health (Carter and Micheli, 2012; Bailey et al, 2012; Eime et al, 2013) it also cites children being bullied, marginalised and humiliated (Wright, 1999; Morgan and Hanson, 2008; Lauritsalo et al, 2015). Therefore, unlike physical health there was not a universal consensus by pupils of PE providing mental health benefits. Although, the split tended to lie along the fault line of ability it was not exclusively low ability pupils who saw PE as detrimental to mental health. Even though many high ability pupils sensed PE as a mental boost, others felt the pressure to perform and self-censure or even spectator censure for performance. Pupils tend to feel the gaze of being watched much more intensely in PE than any other subject (Cameron and Humbert, 2020). For some pupils PE heightened the desire for visibility as self-esteem was harvested from participation but for others it amplified the desire for invisibility as self-esteem was drained. Self-esteem was not the sole tenet of mental health as physique could also play a crucial role. The essence of a PE lesson is about being exposed. Pupils' bodies and physique are exposed, and their skill levels are exposed like no other subject lesson in school. The body is central to PE and is so important to adolescence and growing up. The girls in this study, in particular, raised issues to concerning the body and PE. The changing room and lesson itself allow all present to survey and judge each other or undertake comparison (Hills, 2007; Fisette, 2011). This exposure can influence their participation and be positive or detrimental to their self-esteem, self-worth and socio-cultural standing within the group. The outcome drives their desire for (in)visibility

The spectre of weight, which can haunt adults as well as children, cannot be hidden away in the PE scenario. Pupils and teachers alike can inspect, compare and judge bodies (Fisette, 2011). Children deemed to be overweight are more likely to be victims of bullying (McCormack et al, 2011; Brixval et al, 2012) and consequently they can try to avoid PE (Puhl and Luedicke, 2012). This issue (and the subsequent consequences) was raised by pupils both male and female and cut across the themes identified from pressure to development to participation to health and to choice of activity. This was not as readily solved by the choice or ability setting solutions suggested by the pupils. This group of pupils were congruent with Fielding and Rudduck's (2002, p.2) 'silenced voices' as many children seemed to suffer in silence and certainly craved invisibility. Evans (2003) argues that being 'overweight' is socially constructed, as is the effect it has upon PE performance. However, due to physical capital and habitus reflecting the ideal PE physique (Bourdieu, 1986; Evans, 2003) anyone not attaining that standard can be open to censure and ridicule. Moreover, on a socio-cultural level the non-acceptance of certain body shapes translates into the PE classroom and subsequent negative attitudes can be attributed to pupils or teachers alike, with teachers' attitudes having a significant impact on alienation (Carlson, 1995). On the contrary, pupils with an 'acceptable' sporting physique have a lot of 'capital' on show and thus visibility helped them to thrive in the environment (Bourdieu, 1986; Fisette, 2011). Those with bodies judged less acceptable in the environment can become or can wish to become invisible (Fisette, 2011). Pupils were less forthcoming with a solution to this issue apart from advocating losing weight, but this reinforces the ideal body scenario. One area that may help was the indication of some wanting to participate in PE with friends, who are less likely to be critical of weight, and also choice in order to undertake an activity that they enjoyed and possibly felt more able in engagement. Ability setting being the pupils' main priority would not necessarily align to friendship groups, although it also may ameliorate with capital being more equal among peers and hence regulate standing and power in the field through equivalence.

Such notions of physique contributed to ability construction. This was aided by habitus of pupils and the social capital they possessed which they could trade beneficially in the arena of PE (Bourdieu, 1986; Evans, 2004; Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). Ability construction could aid both visibility or invisibility by promoting or marginalising pupils due to their habitus or capital (Evans, 2004; Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). Similar to physique, skill level is open to scrutiny by peers and teachers which can be accompanied by comparison and judgement (Fisette, 2011). This in turn could ignite or augment the desire for (in)visibility amongst pupils in PE. Ability construction could limit or enhance opportunities for pupils and create consequences for some pupils. Stories from pupils in both schools, such as Michael (IS) indicate the neglect and side-lining of less able pupils, by teachers, can happen from early on. This neglect and the glare from the high ability pupils can render the low ability invisible. Subsequently, pupils of high ability were in a privileged position regarding achievement whereas low ability were condemned to the margins with few opportunities to acquire or display cultural capital (Hay and MacDonald, 2010b). Ability construction affected all the themes and may have been mitigated through the consistency of ability setting but this

solution is paradoxical due to the established powerful agents being the ability constructors. Consequently, perennial low-ability identity of some pupils will continue to endure (Hay and MacDonald, 2010b).

The culture of hegemonic masculinity in PE (Bramham, 2003; Connell, 2008; Tischler and McCaughy, 2011; Parker and Curtner-Smith, 2011) and subsequent influence upon physique and the stereotyping of sports is a cause of the (in)visibility of pupils. Those pupils of either gender not fulfilling the masculine traits of PE or not having the corresponding physique have less capital in the field. The stereotyping of sports limits the opportunity of males and females to discover a sport that they may enjoy and possibly excel in, which would increase their capital and hence standing in the PE arena. This reduces visibility for these pupils. Contrastingly, pupils with masculine traits valued in PE can be elevated in the arena. Pupils with the matching physique and those who excel at traditional gender dictated sports have the capital and habitus to increase their standing and power in the field. This increases visibility for these pupils.

#### **10.4 Solutions to (in)visibility from Pupil Voice**

In summary, although relational interaction occurs in all subjects it appears in PE that such relationships can be more extreme. This leads to the (in)visibility syndrome. The pressure and resultant censure that some pupils experience and conversely the praise and capital that some pupils gain can drive pupils to the extremities of this visual spectrum. The absence of choice of what to engage with and whom to engage with, can also exacerbate the desire for invisibility. Likewise, the enjoyment level and sense of development or ability can place pupils voluntarily or unwillingly at a position on the (in)visibility continuum. Pupils can use techniques to hide in PE in order not to lose face either in the subject or socially (Omundsen, 2004; Ntoumaris et al, 2010). Alongside this intrinsic desire to hide or be seen, physique and ability are social constructs and therefore the powerful agents create the doxa to benefit themselves. If this dominant habitus and resultant beneficial capitals do not match an individual, they then can be unwillingly marginalised into the non-visual part of the spectrum. Likewise, those with the required habitus and capital can find themselves automatically in the limelight.

The solutions to (in)visibility posed by the pupils centred around ability setting and choice. This suggested an intuitive understanding that they could not change doxa due to the powerful agents (Bourdieu, 1986) and the resultant habitus and capital within PE. Therefore, changes in pedagogy, curriculum and culture were not proposed by the pupils with indications that these could only be achieved by a piecemeal process over time. Their solutions of choice and ability setting both have a positive effect upon the other themes. The opposing ends of the ability spectrum seemed to desire choice and ability setting although they were for different reasons. The difference seems to centre around pressure, with low ability seeing ability setting and choice relating to less pressure whereas the high ability considering it to be enhancing challenge. Either way, it increased enjoyment which is directly related to

participation (Prochaska et al, 2003; Smith 2006). Such solutions also supported visibility and could lead some pupils from darkness into light. This could be on a voluntary basis with regard to a greater desire to uncloak or even from a capital perspective as pupils having a choice or in the parity of an ability setting may increase their capital within the field and become noticeable to the most powerful agents (the teachers).

The Choice visibility model (Figure 15) created enjoyment, which is a precursor of involvement and hence participation leading to (less) pressure and the consequent benefits of health and development. This aided the desire for or indeed causes visibility.

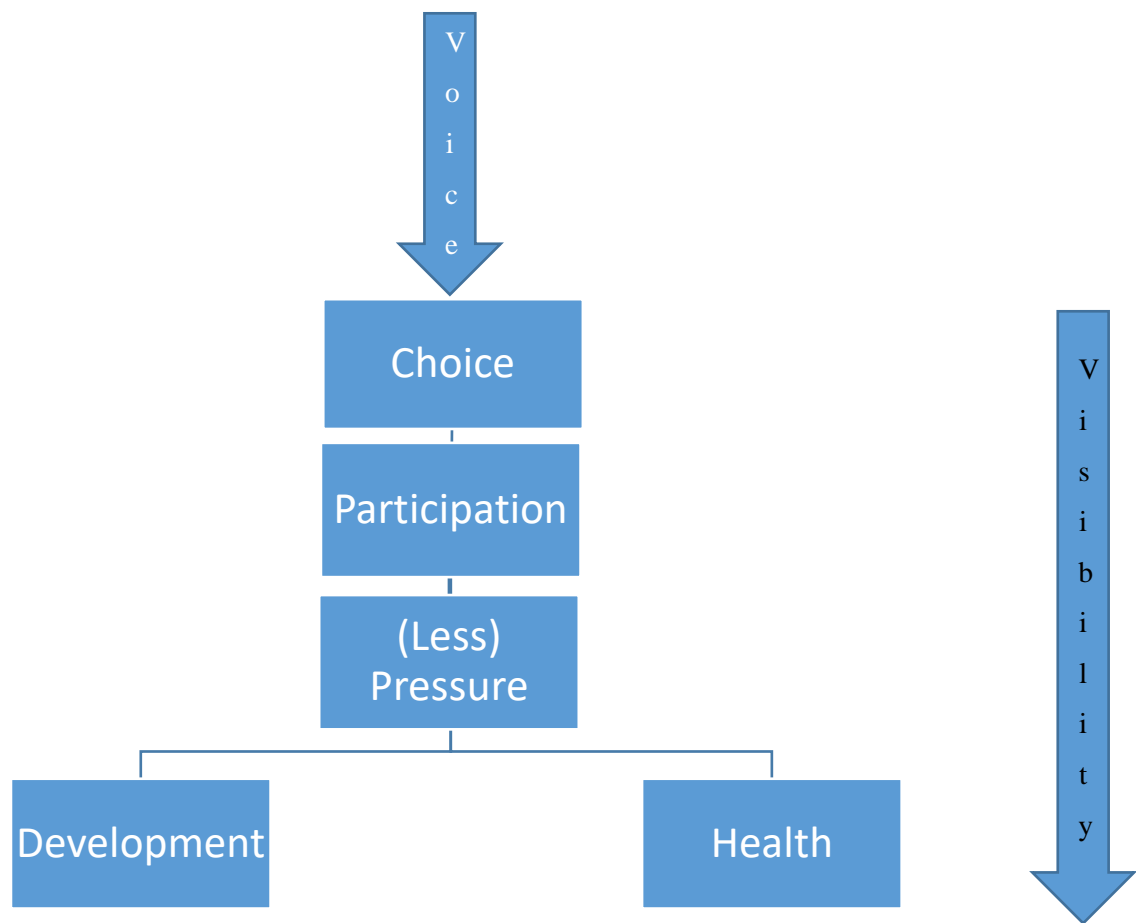


Figure 15: The Choice Visibility model

Pupil voice is the direct architect of this choice model. From early on in the study (the first focus group at IS), their desire for choice was raised. Such choice leads to participation and less pressure as desired by less able, or greater challenge and pressure for some more able, which ultimately leads pupils to reap the benefits of health and development. This would make lifelong participation more likely (Lynstad et al, 2013) and help lift the cloak of invisibility that some pupils hide under or are involuntary placed under.

The three aspects of choice identified by the pupils were what they do, how they do it and who they do it with. The latter links choice to their other solution of ability setting, as they were unambiguous that who to do it with were pupils of equivalent ability. Although both solutions were constructed by pupils, ability setting predominated the discourse.

The Ability setting visibility model (Figure 16) creates (less) pressure on individuals which leads to more enjoyment the precursor for participation and these subsequently support development and health. Similar to the choice model, this then creates the desire for or causes greater visibility.

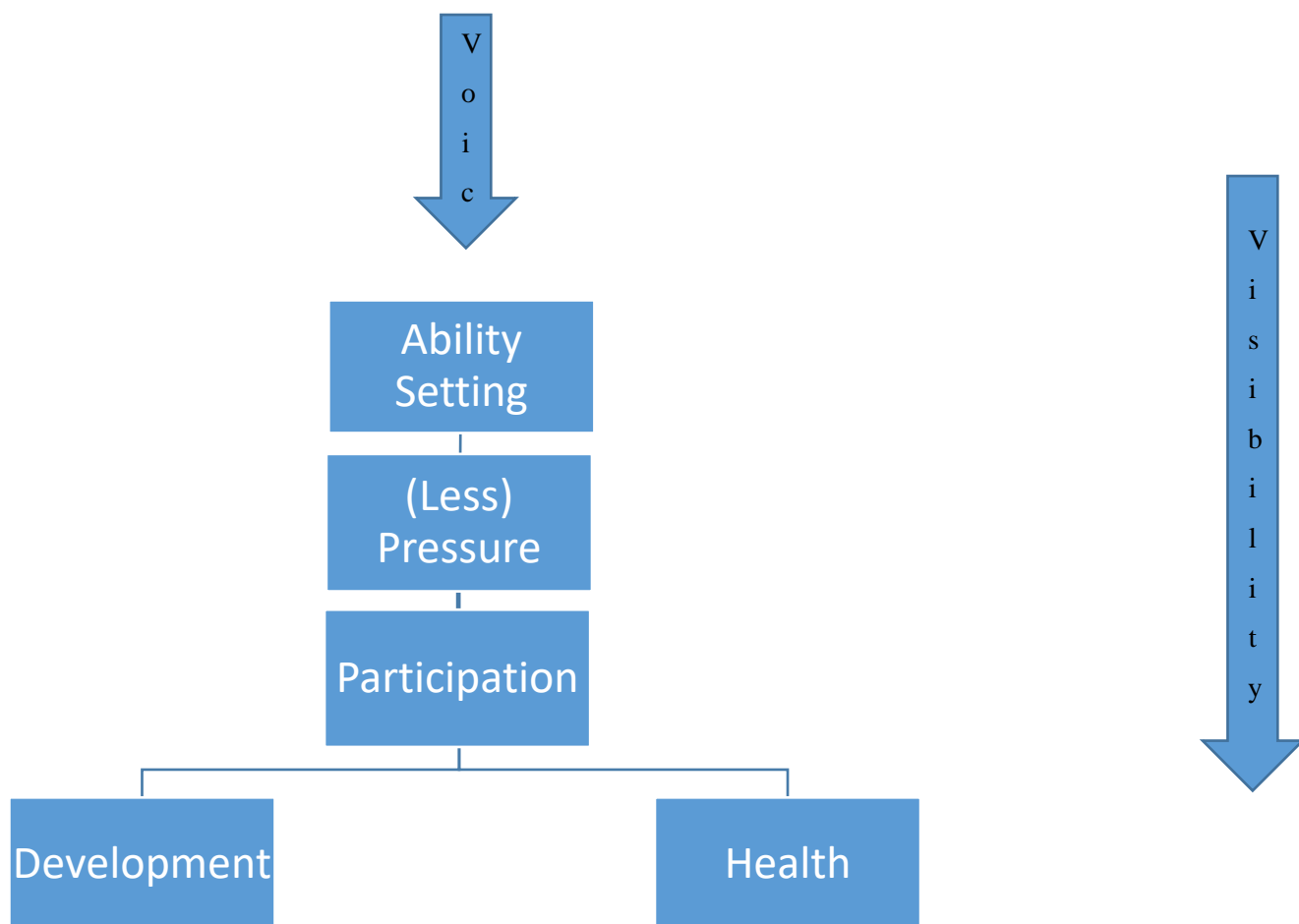


Figure 16: The Ability Setting Visibility model

Once again, this ability setting model is the direct result of pupil voice. Their voice on ability setting became louder throughout the research journey until forming a crescendo as a solution to issues faced in PE. Despite evidence to the contrary regarding the benefits of ability setting (Francis et al, 2017; EEF Toolkit, 2018), the pupils as the experts on their experience, feel it would enhance enjoyment and development. This would be by reducing pressure, and resultant censure, for low ability and allow greater engagement. This increases enjoyment leading to participation (Prochaska et al, 2003) which then reaps the benefits of development and health. Similarly, for high ability, challenge is enhanced leading to enjoyment and participation, resulting in development and health benefits. The direction for all pupils being one of visibility which is most significant for those currently invisible.

Although the models devised by voice are generic, they could be nuanced for individual pupils. If the themes were on abacus bars that could be moved in either direction, then such settings for each individual child could be plotted. These would indicate where each child was on the spectrum of seeing PE as forced or enjoyable participation, and how visible or invisible they are or wanted to be in PE. Due to the interlinked nature of the themes, it then follows that schools could adjust ability setting and/or choice for individuals to attempt to move them along the spectrum towards a positive experience resulting in a non-coercive and enjoyable view to PE participation and an assenting attitude with regard to their own visibility. The social or cultural capital gained from such an exercise could also prevent enforced invisibility.

### **10.5 (In)visibility Conclusion**

In Physics there is a phenomenon known as wave particle duality where an electron can exist as a particle and a wave at the same time. This duality seems to apply equally to PE for pupils. One pupil can feel highly able, enjoy PE, finding it relaxing and good for health and feel they have choice in activity. This pupil coexists alongside a pupil who feels low ability, dreads PE, feels pressure that is detrimental to health and feels they have no choice in activity. Although coexist sounds like they both live in harmony, the reality seems to indicate that the journey and experience of the latter is a deleterious existence whereas the former can be self-affirming. This manifests itself in a desire for or coerced (in)visibility. Pupil voice has not only exposed this world it has also suggested a solution to make the experience of all in PE to be richer and more enjoyable. Listening to this voice is the litmus test for adults and will reveal the true degree of (in)visibility of pupils.



## Chapter 11. Conclusion

‘they tend to get quite angry and a little bit malicious’ (Edward, SS)

### 11.1 Pupil Voice and Themes

#### *11.1.1 Pupil Voice*

Pupils are the most important group in schools, without them schools would not exist. When pupils speak, it matters (Fielding, 2004b) but many voices are ‘silent or silenced’ (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002, p.2). The voices of pupils are becoming more common in school-based research (Bloemart et al, 2020) although power relations within school can stifle and dominate voice resulting in the reassertion of institutional control (Robinson and Taylor, 2013). Pupil voice needs to be authentic (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006) but can be tokenistic and not listened to (Jopling and Riordan, 2021). Pupil voice in PE tends to be limited especially with regard to process, to boys’ voices and independent schools. This study set out to be a platform for pupil voice in PE, to hear, listen to and propagate what they say. Although impossible to eradicate, the influence of adult voice was mitigated as much as possible to allow authentic pupil voice to be heard. The pupils drove the direction of the research initially through the focus groups, followed by their breadth of voice through the questionnaire survey and depth of voice via the interviews. At all stages the environments created were conducive to pupils feeling that they could share their own thoughts and opinions and not what they thought any adult such as teachers or the researcher wanted to hear. This seems to be apparent given the unambiguous and frank nature of their findings (see Chapter 10). Their participation rating also features highly on scales such as Hart (1992), Shier (2001) and Fielding (2011). However, due to the nature of the study their voices are mediated by myself, in the context of theory from adult voice. This is the limiting factor in the voice process.

This thesis has been a journey, in fact it has been a tale of two journeys; that of mine as a researcher attempting to give a platform to pupil voice but also that of pupils and the stories of their PE journeys which they face every week in schools. The myriad of experiences which different pupils can face and the consequences, both positive and negative, bestowed upon them are quite stark. The desire for or coerced (in)visibility that PE in school can instigate, and the reasons for such, contrast sharply. Although, it is a spectrum of experience, at the extremes (which cover many pupils) it is a tale of two experiences, one being enjoyment, achievement and self-esteem and the other being of failure, self-doubt and censure.

### 11.1.2 Themes and (In)visibility

The themes of choice, participation, health, development and ability, and pressure were all derived from the findings of the pupils using thematic analysis. The themes have a duality being distinct but also interrelated at the same time. The themes depict the range of experiences and hence range of voices of pupils in PE. It is essential that they are heard whether they are expressing '*moral outrage*' or '*it's my passion*', both are equally important, but one needs addressing immediately as pupils should not suffer as a result of censure or humiliation in school under any circumstances. This of course then needs, as Bourdieu (1986) expresses, '*the powerful agents*' to act as only they have the power to change the doxa. To date of course in PE, they have not acted as this would not be the situation if they had, although in their defence they may not have heard the voice of pupils. Bourdieu (1977a; 1986) would argue that they deliberately reproduce the structures and inequalities in PE as that reflects and maintains their dominant position with the capital of the high ability, competitive sports person and the corresponding physique perpetuating the culture of hegemonic masculinity.

There is however a solution to the issues raised by pupils which they themselves sought to express. Their resolution focussed upon ability setting and/or choice of activity, which no matter what ability level pupils were, was seen as desirable and would improve the experience for all in PE. This would continue to allow pupils in the spotlight to bask in their visibility but would also allow other pupils to retreat from the shadows. The pupils indicated that the glare of the high ability contributes to the invisibility of the low ability, but the distance created between the groups through ability setting would aid their re-emergence. Despite research evidence to the contrary about the effectiveness of ability setting (Francis et al, 2017; EEF Toolkit, 2018), pupils were adamant this was a solution. Therefore, according to their voice, PE may be an exception for ability setting.

The schools in this study do not have to follow the national curriculum so do have the freedom and flexibility to change their curriculum to meet the call of these voices. Although this flexibility is a complex issue and could be seen as theoretical due to attainment targets, non-accredited PE is surely an area where such liberty could be exercised. Even schools who have to follow the national curriculum could take heed of these findings and could certainly implement ability settings and improve choice should they so wish. Schools who do already have forms of ability setting (which pupils alluded to in this study), need to ensure they are accurately assessed, they do not mix ability settings (as seemed to happen in the state school) and the lower ability groups are not second-class citizens (as seemed to happen in the independent school). It is not only crucial but the right of lower ability pupils in PE to get as much support for development from teachers as the higher ability sets. Lower ability pupils also want (and have a right to) as much choice as the higher ability sets, which was particularly an issue raised by pupils in the independent school. The degree of ability setting in both schools varied with many pupils speaking of the mixing of high and low ability pupils and the resultant issues that subsequently arose.

The emergent themes were distinct but related at the same time. They help to tell the story about children wherever they are in their real situation. Although two schools are involved, this study deals with the pupils as one group of children and only highlights differences of school or gender if they are of significance. The findings were used to derive a best fit theoretical framework, in terms of their voice, in order to interpret meanings and understanding behind why such experiences were happening. Social field theory as applied by Bourdieu was the selected interpretative tool which on one level was quite apt given Bourdieu's theory related to his own childhood experiences (Bourdieu, 2004; Kramsch, 2010). PE does appear as an arena with habitus and capital dominating the participants, creating diverse experiences, depending upon if a pupil is in possession of such habitus and capital which is valued in the field. The powerful agents dominate the field to sustain and re-create the structures and inequalities which advantage themselves. The resultant effect created a desire for or coerced (in)visibility among many pupils.

## **11.2 Reflection on the process and my journey**

The other journey in the thesis was mine, as a researcher this has been my PhD journey, although it was not travelled alone. My supervisors and supportive colleagues were there throughout and even more importantly, pupil voice was with me all the way and I did not lose sight of this for a minute, wanting to ensure it was heard in as pure form as possible. The frustrations were many along the path, but the worst involved the inevitable compromise between the pupil voice I wanted to express and the adult voice requirements of a PhD thesis. I did consciously challenge every aspect of the thesis to mitigate the influence of adult voice but ultimately due to the nature of a thesis there is a trade-off, while at the same time preserving as authentic form of pupil voice as possible. My own interest in sport was something to be aware of and keep its influence in check. However, the influence of pupil voice worked upon me as despite a lack of participation in PE for many years following a very active engagement in my youth, I did commence activity again in the shape of running, initially with a club, experiencing some of the issues the pupils had described. However, this involvement (and enjoyment) of participation in sport again, is a personal lasting legacy and benefit of the study.

The process of a part-time PhD running concurrently with the demands of my job were also a challenge. Fitting it in at the end of the day and weekends is a hard way to undertake such an enormous project. At times it felt like the end would never come, but here it is, a 6-year odyssey, which is quite a proportion of life.

My academic career has been the wrong way around. Normally a PhD is done when embarking on such a career at the beginning rather than towards the end. It is a case of if only I could go back and tell my younger self. Intellectually wise, although I had taught and marked at level 7 over many years, I had never operated at level 8. The understanding of what a PhD thesis is and the journey to find confidence and belief to rationalise and explain my

own thinking and reasons and see them as parity, took a while. However, the empowerment it gave when it finally dawned, will stand me in good stead for future research.

### **11.3 Contribution to knowledge**

This study is original, it has contributed to, and extended the fields of pupil voice and the experiences pupils have in everyday PE settings. The contribution this thesis makes to knowledge is in three main areas, those being involvement, outcome and methodological approach. Specifically, it has added to knowledge in the following areas:

1. PE creates a desire for or coerced (in)visibility for many pupils. This can marginalise the less able and condemn them to less support and misinterpretation of any achievement. It can also cause humiliation and damage self-esteem to those who feel judged and censured due to their skill level or physique.
2. Ability setting can be seen in research as having no benefits and indeed detrimental to low ability (Francis et al, 2017; EEF Toolkit, 2018). However, the voice of these pupils is unequivocal with regard to the benefits that ability setting can bring to their PE experience. These range from participation to pressure to development to mental health and physical health. This outweighs any other finding, as the key solution from pupils in this study to the issues of PE and is different to other studies such as Smith (2006) which suggested friendship groups are the best solution to PE issues.
3. Choice of activity in PE could also increase participation by giving pupils the opportunity to find something they enjoy or are good at. This could have massive benefits for how pupils perceive PE and for lifelong participation. PE is a non-exam subject in schools (with GCSE PE being a separate cohort) so there is no reason why the range of sports could not be extended. This gives some pupils a chance to improve their social capital, and this could also reflect on how their ability is judged by teachers. This would also ease pressure on pupils and lead to greater participation and mental/physical health. This is especially true for older years in school as they are not long before leaving school, so establishing PE practice in something they enjoy before leaving school could be crucial. The choice in PE which pupils spoke of was three-fold: What they do, how they do it and who they do it with. What they do was choice of activity, how they do it was choice of competitiveness or not, and who they do it with was pupils of equivalent ability. Some pupils also wanted a fourth choice, that of the subject being optional.
4. The pupils in this study are unique and important. Their voice matters and their individual and group experiences are all original.

5. Pupils do want to have a voice in PE, and this sentiment was expressed from the early stages of this study during the focus groups. These pupils have used their voice to drive a research project in the direction of their views and experiences of PE. They have expressed opinions and thoughts on various issues related to PE in school and to a lesser degree, sport outside of school. Their voices have never been heard before, so this contributes to knowledge in the field of PE in schools.
6. The process of this study was key, with the focus on children wherever they are, in their real situation. Although two schools are involved it deals with the children as one group of children and only highlights differences if they are of significance. It was also driven by pupils, rather than adults deciding there is an issue and consulting pupils, it was instead finding out what pupils thought with them dictating what they felt were issues. The process was as important as the outcome as it authenticated the outcome. There are not many pupil voice studies in PE which are driven by pupils, and where there are studies, they tend to focus upon girls and state schools. Therefore, this study has an originality not just in the process but with the involvement of many pupils, a number of whom were boys and were in an independent school. The process adds to the knowledge of the pupil voice method, especially one within the constraints of a PhD thesis.

## **11.4 Policy and Practice**

The Covid pandemic of 2020-21 has highlighted the crucial importance of physical health and fitness and the effect fitness can have upon illness (Whitty, 2020a). Likewise, for many people during lockdown the only opportunity to leave the home, apart from essential shopping, was exercise. If people are not in the habit of going out for exercise, then they may have been less likely to undertake this activity. The strain the pandemic has placed upon mental health has also been immense for children and adults (HM Government, 2020b). Regular exercise and the endorphins this produces could also be a support for mental health of individuals (Bailey et al, 2018; Whitty, 2020b). However, once again if people have not had positive experiences in physical activity or found an activity they enjoy as children, then they are less likely to engage in such exercise (Cardinal et al, 2013). Pupils have missed many PE lessons in school during lockdown and also have not had the opportunity for involvement in community sport. If they are of the disposition that they dislike PE, then they are not likely to go for a run or tune into a YouTube fitness guru during lockdown. There is a wide debate about catch-up for pupils in academic subjects and subsequent Government funding. However, catch-up in PE is never mentioned and for many pupils, these lessons are lost forever, and some pupils may never catch up as no strategies are in place to support them.

This alone is a cogent argument for improving the experience of PE for all pupils in school. However, this thesis is full of stories of censure, mental health issues, humiliation and exclusion in a school curriculum subject. Equally, it is also full of stories of enjoyment, self-esteem, achievement and success. It is a story of the desire for or coerced

(in)visibility among pupils. There is a stark duality of co-existence between those who flourish and those who struggle in the same lesson. Surely, it is in the interests of all to try to address the issues through a pupil-led approach with voices so distinct and clear as expressed in this study. Some may argue that such an approach is a risk, implementing pupil led policy and practice as opposed to adult led. What pupils have to say may be feared by some teachers and institutions (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002). However, PE is a core subject in terms of life but not necessarily so in schools as for most it is a non-accredited subject. There are no league tables to judge and measure schools against, in respect of PE. Therefore, it would be less risky for schools to implement pupil voice in PE as the stakes are lower for them (academically) but so crucially important as a skill for life.

Pupils in this study demonstrated a lucid, coherent and mature understanding of the nature of PE, its effects upon them and solutions to improve the experience and skill development. Schools tend to offer PE as a single diet, but differentiation of choice and ability setting were clear enhancements suggested by pupils across the proficiency spectrum. The process of hearing and listening to pupil voice is as important as the outcome. It may be hard to learn from voices if schools or teachers do not want to hear them (Johnson and Nichols, 1995; Bragg, 2001) but if they speak, schools and teachers must listen and act (Wilson and Corbett, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2006). This thesis has provided a model to try and accomplish this. However, schools have the opportunity to move further up the 'ladder of participation' (Hart, 1992) given they are not constrained by academic thesis rigour and they can guarantee implementation of outcome.

Pupil voice in PE is quite silent, but it is arguably the area where it is most needed given the degree of (in)visibility and consequences it can have for lifelong participation. On the duality of experience spectrum, a pupil-led approach through voice could potentially move a number of pupils away from 'loathe' and towards 'like'. The impact of this could be felt by the individual, community and the nation through improved mental and physical health and the associated economic benefits.

#### ***11.4.1 Implications for Practice***

The key implications for practice in PE to arise out of this study are:

- Involvement of Pupil Voice in decision-making in PE- Pupils have a great deal of experience to share and sound problem-solving advice to give, with regard to PE
- Ability Setting- although contrary to research, pupil voice suggests setting on ability will aid development, alleviate censure and pressure, and improve mental health
- Invisibility- teachers need to be aware of PE practice creating coerced and desired invisibility among pupils and actively create strategies to counteract such outcomes

- Advantages of Choice- choice can make a big difference to participation and engagement in PE. It can also enhance self-esteem and can contribute to a lifelong PE culture
- Changes to delivery and curriculum- this is crucial to support mental health of pupils and engage pupils in positive enjoyable participation

## **11.5 Future Research**

### ***11.5.1 Impact Activity***

Although the schools have been provided with the reports, it is not within the gift of this study to guarantee enactment and hence impact within both schools. However, I could with permission from the schools, research the impact of suggestions should they be implemented. The other area of impact is that which the study has on the academic field. For their voice to be heard on an academic platform will be key to impact. The monitoring of future research projects in PE will indicate if such a methodology and outcomes are having an impact in the field.

### ***11.5.2 Advocating for Importance of Voice***

Voice is important for all groups, however there are many groups without powerful agents that are less likely to be heard. Children in particular, can reflect such a group in the Education system but as this study has highlighted, there are sub-groups of pupil voice who are even less likely to be heard. This study has attempted to showcase such voices and facilitate them being heard and listened to. These children have authentic voices, and they are not just voices stating problems and issues, they are voices that are problem solving by suggesting well thought out and cogent solutions.

### ***11.5.3 Authentic Voices (Children are one group but others struggle to have a voice)***

Other groups in society struggle to be heard and this methodology could also be applied to their situations to enable their voices to be raised and heard. This is a consideration for future research when dealing with people and will be a key facet of what I endeavour to undertake in research going forward.

### ***11.5.4 Pupil involvement in totality without constraints of thesis protocol***

This study, being a PhD thesis, did constrain pupil voice at times as it could not eradicate adult voice, and ownership of the study had to reside with the author. However, a next step would be to endeavour a research project fully lead, planned, analysed and interpreted by pupils which would enable the purest form of pupil voice. The outcomes of such a project would be fascinating and could influence best practice.

### ***11.5.5 Adult Voice in PE***

Although, this PhD has spent its whole-time mitigating adult voice, it does not mean that adult voice is not important, indeed it is, as all voices are important. Following an anecdotal discussion with a colleague about PE in adulthood she alluded that she had started open water swimming (joined a club) but was put off due to the high ability of some of the members (those who did triathlon) who were very competitive, even swimming over her at times. This led to her stopping participation. These are some of the exact same problems faced by children and raised by their voices in this study. Therefore, it would be useful to research the issues that adults face not only to compare them to children but to support adults in pursuit of lifelong PE participation. There are many marginalised adult voices that also need to be heard.

### **11.6 Summary**

‘It was the best of times; it was the worst of times’ (Dickens, 1859, p.1), this aptly sums up the duality of the PE experience for pupils. The consequences of this for pupils can be immediate as well as affecting long term lifelong participation. However, the pupils themselves have solutions if only schools would listen. If they listen to the voice of pupils, they can avert the desire for or coerced (in)visibility in PE and can continue to allow some pupils to bask in the sunlight while uncloaking those currently in the shadows. Whether they do listen will demonstrate the true importance and visibility of pupil voice in schools.



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## **Appendix 1. Focus Group Questions**

*(Initially get pupils to introduce themselves and say a little bit about themselves)*

Overarching question is:

***Tell me about your experiences and feelings regarding PE in School and Sport outside of School.***

Supplementary questions to use to stimulate and structure discussion:

*(Flow of questions from school PE to sport participation outside school to the wider world of sport)*

### ***School PE***

What kind of things do you do in PE at School?

What do you like? What don't you like? (Why do you like/dislike this?)

What is it about 'X sport' you like/dislike? Why do you like it or dislike it?

If you could choose, what kind of things would you like to do in PE?

Is PE an important subject? (Why is it or why isn't it?)

### ***Sport Participation Outside School***

Does anyone participate in sport outside of school? (If so, which sports?)

Why do you participate/not participate in sport outside of school?

What do you like? What don't you like? (Why do you like/dislike this?)

In an ideal world how would you make sport outside of school better?

### ***Wider World of Sport***

In an ideal world how would you describe sport and why?

Have you got a favourite sports player? If so, why is he/she your favourite player?

What makes you remember famous sports people?

How are certain sports similar or different i.e., football and swimming, rugby and ice skating, netball and tennis.

What type of person would be good at these sports?



## Appendix 2. Questionnaire Survey Questions

Which School do you attend?

Are you female or male?

☐ Female

☐ Male

Please state how old you are?

Which year are you in at School?

☐ Year 10

☐ Year 11

What type of activities do you do in PE? **(Please tick all the activities you do)**

- ☐ Football
- ☐ Netball Rugby
- ☐ Athletics
- ☐ Hockey
- ☐ Cricket
- ☐ Basketball
- ☐ Rounders
- ☐ Dodgeball
- ☐ Baseball
- ☐ Dance
- ☐ Cross-country
- ☐ running
- ☐ Tennis
- ☐ Golf
- ☐ American football
- ☐ Swimming
- ☐ Gymnastics
- ☐ Other
- ☐

If you selected Other, please say which sport or activity you mean:



Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement

Please select only 1 answer per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoy PE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain why you feel like this?

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement

**Please select only 1 answer per row.**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My ability in PE is good	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain why you feel this?

Please rate how you agree or disagree with the following statement

Please select only 1 answer per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
In Primary School I enjoyed PE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What has changed, if anything, about your PE experience since Primary School?

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

Please select only 1 answer per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel under pressure when participating in PE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain why you feel like this?

Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

Please select only 1 answer per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
In PE I feel I have a choice about which activities or sports I participate in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain why you feel like this?



Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

Please select only 1 answer per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The school supports less able pupils in PE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school identifies talented pupils in PE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school has a fair system to pick pupils to represent it in sports teams	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pupils can influence what happens in PE through evaluations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you think participation in sport is good for your health?

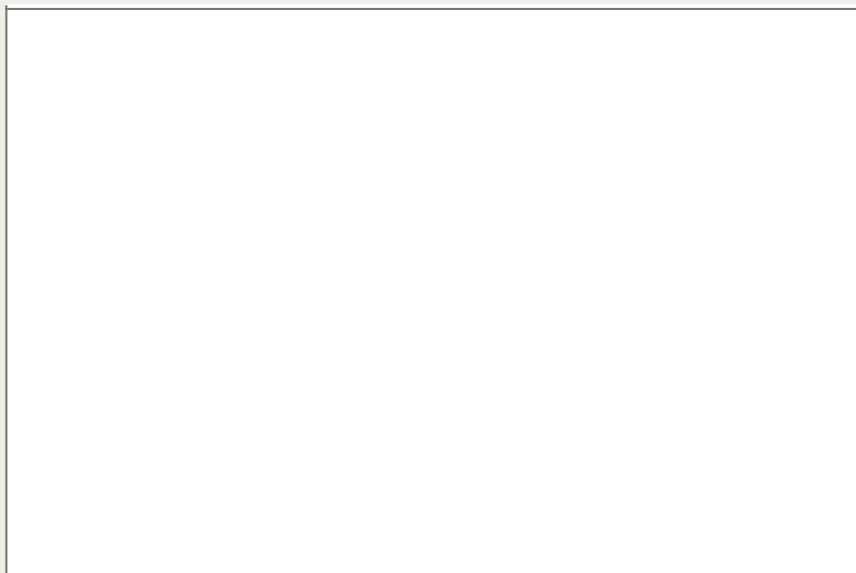
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

**If Yes, go to Page 11**

**If No, go to Page 12**

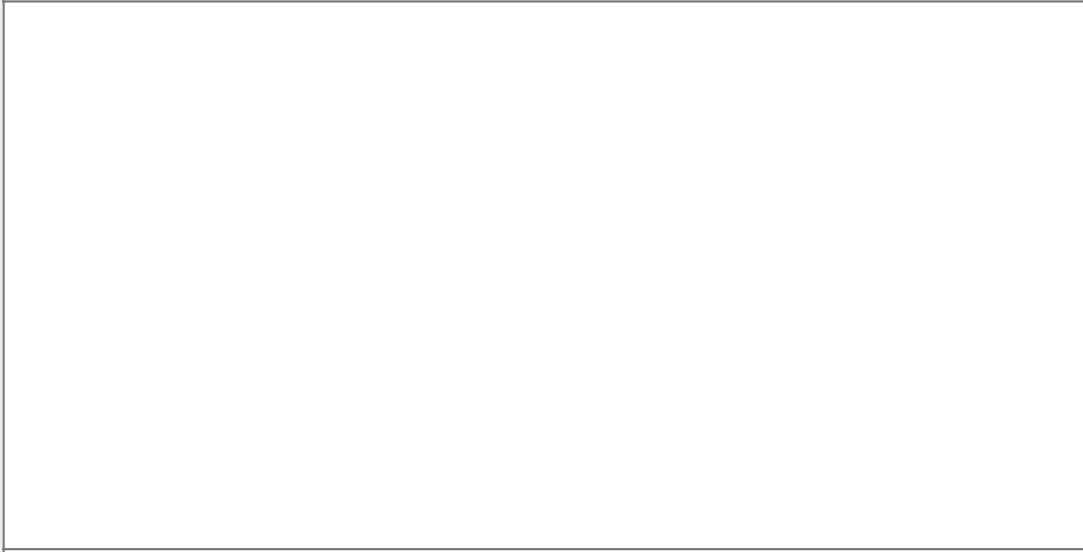
**If Don't know, got to Page 13**

Why do you think participation in sport is good for your health?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write their answer to the question above it. The box is positioned on the left side of a larger, light beige rectangular area that serves as a workspace.

**Now go to page 13**

Why do you think participation in sport is not good for your health?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a user to write their response to the question above it. The box is positioned on the left side of a light beige background.

Do you think PE helps you to develop skills?

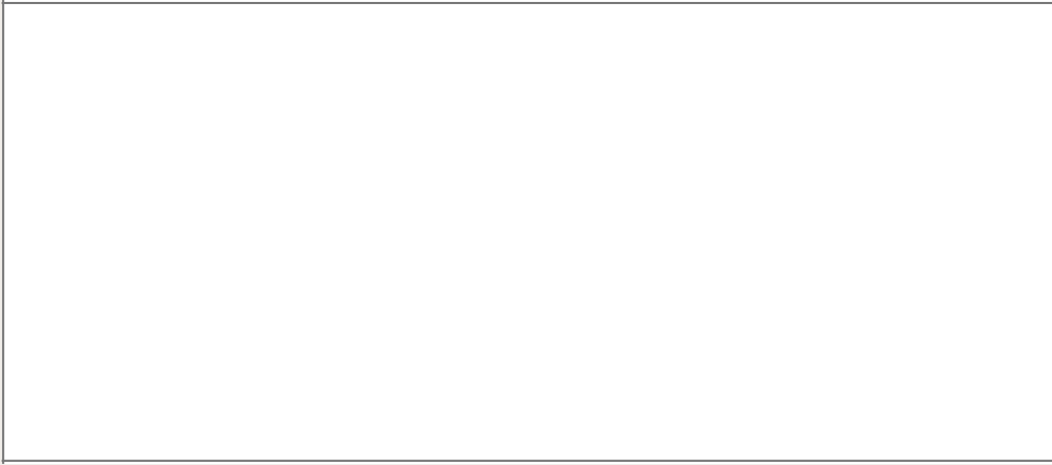
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

**If Yes, go to Page 14**

**If No, go to Page 15**

**If Don't know, got to Page 16**

What skills does PE help you to develop?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write their answer to the question above it. The box is positioned on the left side of a light beige background that spans the width of the page.

**Now go to Page 16**

Why does PE not help you to develop skills?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write their answer to the question above it. The box is positioned on a light beige background.

Do you participate in sport outside of school?

☐ Yes

☐ No

**If Yes, go to Page 17**

**If No, go to Page 18**



Which Sport(s) do you participate in outside of school and why?

What sports facilities, if any, do you use outside of school?

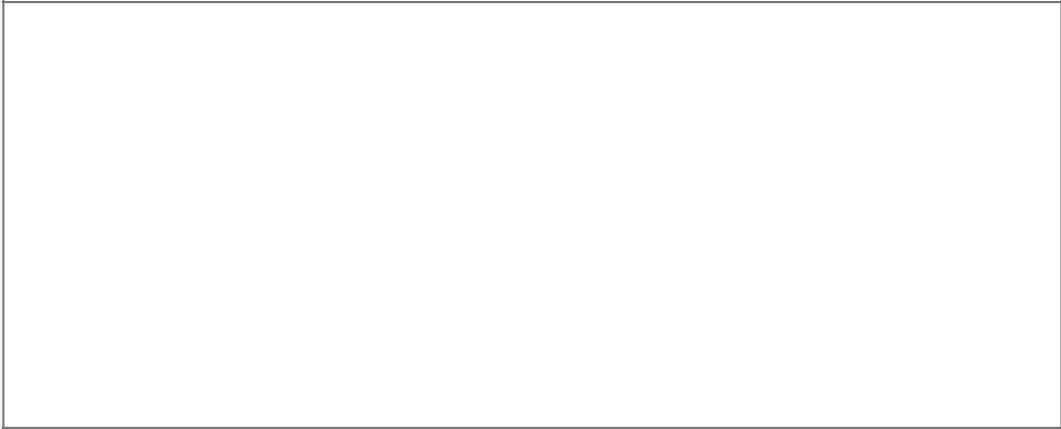
If you participate in sport outside of school do you enjoy it?

- ☐ Strongly Enjoy
- ☐ Enjoy
- ☐ Indifferent
- ☐ Don't Enjoy
- ☐ Strongly Don't Enjoy

Please explain your answer

Now go to Page 19

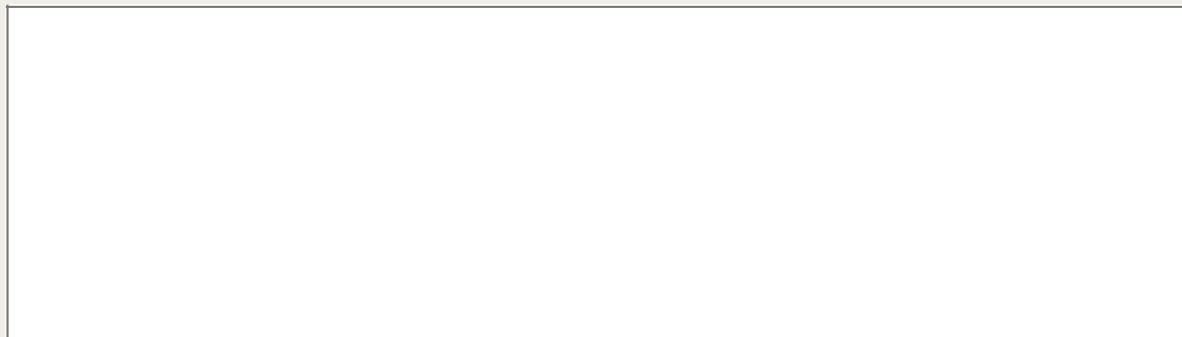
What is the reason that you do not participate in sport outside of school?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a user to write their answer to the question above it. The box is positioned on the left side of a light beige horizontal band that spans the width of the page.

What are the benefits of PE and Sport, if any?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write their answer to the question above it. The box is positioned on a light beige background.

Is there anything you would change about PE in school or sport outside of school?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write their response to the question above. It is positioned on the left side of a light beige horizontal band.

Do you think you will continue to take part in sport after you leave school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Please explain your answer.



Would you consider a career or job in sport?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

**If Yes, go to Page 23**

**If No, go to Page 24**

**If Don't know, got to Page 25**

Please say what type of job you would consider in the field of sport?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to the question above. It is positioned on the left side of a light beige horizontal bar.

**Now go to Page 25**



Please state why you wouldn't consider a job in sport?

Would PE in school help someone become an elite athlete e.g. footballer, swimmer, runner etc.?

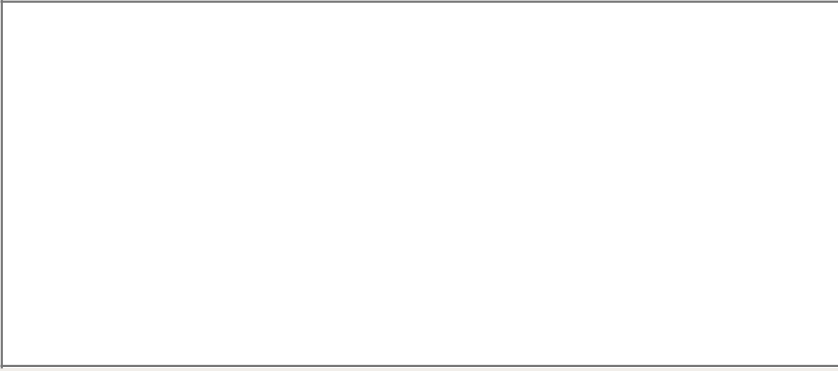
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

**If Yes, go to Page 26**

**If No, go to Page 27**


**If Don't know, got to Page 28**

How would PE in school help someone to become an elite athlete?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write their answer to the question above it. The box is positioned on the left side of a light beige background that spans the width of the page.

**Now go to Page 28**

Why wouldn't PE in school help someone to become an elite athlete?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write their answer to the question above it. The box is positioned on the left side of a light beige horizontal band that spans the width of the page.

If there is anything else you would like to add, please state it here.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to provide additional comments or information. It is positioned on the left side of a light beige horizontal band.

Thank you for taking part in this survey on PE and sport.

### **Appendix 3. Interview Questions**

Overarching question is:

***Tell me about your experiences and feelings regarding PE in School and Sport outside of School.***

Supplementary questions to use if certain issues haven't been raised in overarching question:

1. Do you enjoy PE? Do you think PE is more enjoyable for boys or girls or same for both?
2. How do you see your ability in PE? Has PE developed you in any way?
3. Should all pupils play the same sports i.e., should boys play netball? Why don't they?
4. Do you have choice in PE in school or sport outside of school? What difference would this make?
5. Do you feel any pressure in PE or playing sport outside school?
6. Do you play sport outside school? Why do you play or why don't you play? What facilities do you use? Do you think these facilities are open to all young people? If not, what could prevent them from using them?
7. Is a career in sport worthwhile? Is School PE a platform for elite sports development?
8. What are the benefits if any of sport and PE? How does it benefit you? Do all sports give such benefits (i.e. snooker v football)
9. How would you rate the importance of PE compared to other lessons?
10. Does school support all pupils in PE from able to less able?
11. Is there anything you would change in PE and Sport?

## **Appendix 4. Briefing Sheet for Schools**



### **An Investigation into Physical Education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child**

#### ***Vision of Study***

The study will ascertain the perspectives of young people in the state and independent secondary school sectors regarding their views and experiences of PE and sport. Following a focus group and wider survey of views from Year 10 pupils, the study will then select individual pupils to give their story from their own experience. Selected children will represent the range of ability from gifted and talented to less able as deemed by the Head of School/Head of PE.

All children are important. The views of these children will help inform the debate not only about the pedagogy and experience of the PE class but also that of the wider sporting arena inside and outside school. It will also contrast the experiences between pupils in the state and independent sector. This study will provide an insight into experience and perspective of young people regarding PE and sport in the context of the modern era with its high profile, commercial providers, health agenda and increased grassroots opportunities.

#### ***Data Collection***

It is anticipated that Year 10 or 11 pupils would be chosen to take part in this study. This is because they have built up experience over a number of years from undertaking PE in school and other sport outside of school. They are also at an age when they have the maturity to be able to reflect on such experience.

#### ***Focus Group***

It is anticipated that 6 pupils will take part in a focus group in order to ascertain what they feel are the key themes in this field.



### *Questionnaires*

All of the pupils in year 10 or 11 will be asked to take part in a survey in the form of a questionnaire. It is anticipated that this will take an electronic format (or hard copy if preferred) and should take them no longer than 15 minutes.

### *Interview*

Depending on the results of the questionnaires and on advice from the Head of School/Head of PE, approximately 6 pupils will be asked to take part in an interview about their experiences.

### *Informed Consent*

At every stage of this process, informed consent is a pre-requisite of participation in this study. This is central to the ethics of social research (Homan, 2001).

Anonymity (in the written study) and confidentiality (throughout the whole study) will be granted and informed consent for participation will be sought from, the participating school, the parents and most importantly the children involved. They will be free to withdraw at any point. It will be ensured that informed consent is given, and participation is only on the basis of particular choice and for no other reason. All data will be stored securely with only myself having access and then will be destroyed at the end of the study. All participants will be offered a summary of the findings at the conclusion of the study, as will the school.

### ***Benefits for School***

This will give the school an insight into the experiences of PE/Sport of their children from across the ability range. This will help to inform pedagogy, curriculum and leadership of PE. The school and children will be anonymised in the research findings, however the school would be free to highlight their involvement in this project and future projects as part of the profile of the school. If the school wished to continue this relationship following the end of this project, then we could look to do other research projects as well as building upon the findings of this project.

### ***Benefits for the Pupils***

This will enhance their knowledge of the research process which will support their academic development as they continue in their studies. The project is purely based on pupil voice and thus findings will echo their views, thoughts and opinions. Thus, their views will have an impact on the research debate in this field and potentially future practice.

### ***Timeline***

The anticipated timeline is as follows:

Focus Group- summer Term 2018

Questionnaires- early autumn term 2018

Interviews- late autumn term 2018

Final Findings reported to school- summer term 2019

David Littlefair

Department of Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing

Northumbria University

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## Appendix 5. Briefing Information and Consent Form for Parents (Focus Groups)



### Information Sheet and Consent form for Parents

**Project: An Investigation into Physical Education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child**

**Information about the project:** I am an academic member of staff in the Department of Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing at Northumbria University. I am also studying for a PhD at Northumbria University and I am investigating Physical Education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child.

**Research Method:** If you were willing to allow your child to take part in this study it would mean that they were involved in a Focus group (involving 6-8 children) where they would discuss their experiences, thoughts and opinions regarding PE. The Director of Sport, Mr [REDACTED], has selected the children for this Focus group. The Focus group will last about 30 minutes. I will use a voice recorder to enable me to transcribe their views. All data will be anonymised and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. The data will be destroyed following the hand in date of my thesis. The anonymised data will be discussed with my supervisor and will form the basis of the study. No individual will be able to be identified by my findings.

**Consent:** If you feel you wish to allow your child to contribute to the study please complete and sign the consent form below. Following your consent, I will also ask your child for consent (see their attached consent form). Participation is entirely on a voluntary basis and you or your child can withdraw the use of their data at any time. Participation, non-participation or withdrawal from this

study is not detrimental to you or your child. Please contact me on the telephone number or email address below should you have any questions you would like to ask.

**Data Storage:** All data will be stored by myself, the researcher, and I will be the only person with access to it. Should you withdraw from the study the data from your child will be destroyed. At the end of the study all the data will be destroyed.

**Benefits for the Pupils:** This will enhance their knowledge of the research process which will support their academic development as they continue in their studies. The project is purely based on pupil voice and findings will echo their views, thoughts and opinions. Thus, their views will have an impact on the research debate in this field and potentially future practice.

**Name of Researcher:** David Littlefair; Tel: 019121556676; email: [d.littlefair@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:d.littlefair@northumbria.ac.uk)

**Name of Supervisors:** Dr Nancy Kelly: [nancy.kelly@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:nancy.kelly@northumbria.ac.uk)

Prof Michael Jopling [M.Jopling@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:M.Jopling@wlv.ac.uk)

**Please initial box**

<b>1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information for the above project</b>	
<b>2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask any questions</b>	
<b>3. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that my child or I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason</b>	
<b>4. I have been informed about how the data will be used and stored</b>	
<b>5. I agree for my child to take part in the above project subject to my child also agreeing to participate.</b>	

**Parent**

**Name**

**Signature**

**Date**

.....

.....

.....

**Child Name**

.....

**Researcher**

**Name**

**Signature**

**Date**

.....

.....

.....

## Appendix 6. Parent's Briefing Information and Consent Form (Interviews)



### Information Sheet and Consent form for Parents

**Project:** An Investigation into Physical Education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child

**Information about the project:** I am an academic member of staff in the Department of Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing at Northumbria University. I am also studying for a PhD at Northumbria University and I am investigating Physical Education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child.

**Research Method:** If you were willing to allow your child to take part in this study it would mean that they were involved in an interview where they would discuss their experiences, thoughts and opinions regarding PE and sport. The interview will last about 30 minutes and I will use a voice recorder to enable me to transcribe their views. Although I will conduct the interview, the coordination on behalf of the school will be undertaken by the Head of PE, Miss [REDACTED]. All data will be anonymised, and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. The data will be destroyed following the end of the study which will be approximately May 2021. The anonymised data will be discussed with my supervisor and will form the basis of the study. No individual will be able to be identified by my findings.

**Consent:** If you feel you wish to allow your child to contribute to the study please complete and sign the consent form below. Following your consent, I will also ask your child for their consent (see their attached consent form). Participation is entirely on a voluntary basis and you or your child can withdraw the use of their data at any time. Participation, non-participation or withdrawal from this study is not detrimental to you or your child whatsoever. Please contact me on the telephone number or email address below should you have any questions you would like to ask.

**Data Storage:** All data will be stored by myself, the researcher, and I will be the only person with access to it. At the end of the study all the data will be destroyed.

**Benefits for the Pupils:** This will enhance their knowledge of the research process which will support their academic development as they continue in their studies. The project is purely based on student voice and thus findings will echo their views, thoughts and opinions. Thus, their views will have an impact on the research debate in this field and potentially future practice.

**Name of Researcher:** David Littlefair: Tel: 019121556676; email: [d.littlefair@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:d.littlefair@northumbria.ac.uk)

**Name of Supervisors:** Dr Nancy Kelly: [nancy.kelly@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:nancy.kelly@northumbria.ac.uk)

Prof Michael Jopling [M.Jopling@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:M.Jopling@wlv.ac.uk)

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information for the above project	
2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask any questions	
3. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that my child or I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason	
4. I have been informed about how the data will be used and stored	
5. I agree for my child to take part in the above project subject to my child also agreeing to participate.	

**Parent**

**Name**

**Signature**

**Date**

.....

.....

.....

**Child Name**

.....

**Researcher**

**Name**

**Signature**

**Date**

.....

.....

.....



## Appendix 7. Pupil's Briefing Information and Consent Form (Focus Group)



### Information Sheet and Consent form for Pupils

**Project: An Investigation into Physical Education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child**

**Information about the project:** I am an academic member of staff in the Department of Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing at Northumbria University. I am also studying for a PhD at Northumbria University and I am investigating Physical Education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child.

**Research Method:** If you were willing to take part in this study it would mean me that you were involved in a focus group (involving 6-8 children) where you would discuss your experiences, thoughts and opinions regarding PE. The Head of School/Head of PE has selected all the children for this focus group. The focus group will last about 20- 30 minutes. I will use a voice recorder to enable me to transcribe all the views of the group. All data will be anonymised and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. The data will be destroyed following the end of the study. No individual will be able to be identified by my findings.

**Consent:** If you feel you wish to contribute to the study please complete and sign the consent form below. Participation is entirely on a voluntary basis and you can withdraw the use of your data at any time. Participation, non-participation or withdrawal from this study is not detrimental to you in any way. Please contact me on the email address below should you have any questions you would like to ask.

**Benefits for Pupils:** This will enhance your knowledge of the research process which will support your academic development as you continue in your studies. The project is purely based on pupil voice and findings will echo your views, thoughts and opinions. Thus, your views will have an impact on the research debate in this field and potentially future practice.

**Data Storage:** All data will be stored by myself, the researcher, and I will be the only person with access to it. At the end of the study all the data will be destroyed.

**Name of Researcher:** David Littlefair: [d.littlefair@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:d.littlefair@northumbria.ac.uk)

**Name of Supervisors:** Dr Nancy Kelly: [nancy.kelly@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:nancy.kelly@northumbria.ac.uk)

Prof Michael Jopling [M.Jopling@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:M.Jopling@wlv.ac.uk)

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information for the above project	
2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask any questions	
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason	
4. I have been informed about how the data will be used and stored	
5. I agree to take part in the above project subject to a parent also agreeing to my participation.	

**Name**

**Signature**

**Date**

.....

.....

.....

**Researcher**

**Name**

**Signature**

**Date**

.....

.....

.....

## Appendix 8. Pupil's Briefing Notes and Consent Form (Interviews)



### Information Sheet and Consent form for Pupils

**Project:** An Investigation into Physical Education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child

**Information about the project:** I am an academic member of staff in the Department of Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing at Northumbria University. I am also studying for a PhD at Northumbria University and I am investigating physical education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child.

**Research Method:** If you were willing to take part in this study it would mean me that you were involved in an interview where you would discuss your experiences, thoughts and opinions regarding PE. The interview will last about 30 minutes and I will use a voice recorder to enable me to transcribe your views. All data will be anonymised and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Although I will conduct the interview, the coordination on behalf of the school will be undertaken by the Head of PE, Miss [REDACTED]. The data will be destroyed following the end of the study, which will be by approximately May 2021. No individual will be able to be identified by my findings.

**Consent:** If you feel you wish to contribute to the study please complete and sign the consent form below. Participation is entirely on a voluntary basis and you can withdraw the use of your data at any time. Participation, non-participation or withdrawal from this study is not detrimental to you in any way. Please contact me on the email address below should you have any questions you would like to ask.

**Benefits for Pupils:** This will enhance your knowledge of the research process which will support your academic development as you continue in your studies. The project is purely based on student

voice and findings will echo your views, thoughts and opinions. Thus, your views will have an impact on the research debate in this field and potentially future practice.

**Data Storage:** All data will be stored by myself, the researcher, and I will be the only person with access to it. At the end of the study all the data will be destroyed.

**Name of Researcher:** David Littlefair: [d.littlefair@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:d.littlefair@northumbria.ac.uk)

**Name of Supervisors:** Dr Nancy Kelly: [nancy.kelly@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:nancy.kelly@northumbria.ac.uk)

Prof Michael Jopling [M.Jopling@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:M.Jopling@wlv.ac.uk)

**Please initial box**

<b>1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information for the above project</b>	
<b>2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask any questions</b>	
<b>3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason</b>	
<b>4. I have been informed about how the data will be used and stored</b>	
<b>5. I agree to take part in the above project subject to a parent also agreeing to my participation.</b>	

**Name**

**Signature**

**Date**

.....

.....

.....

**Researcher**

**Name**

**Signature**

**Date**

.....

.....

.....

## **Appendix 9. Parent's Briefing Notes and Opt-out and Pupil informed consent prior to commencing survey (Questionnaire Survey)**



### **Information Sheet for Parents**

**Project: An Investigation into Physical Education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child**

**Dear Parent,**

The School is currently involved in a research project with Northumbria University. The project is investigating Physical Education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child. The whole study is being driven by the voice of the pupils and as part of this we would like to sample wider views of children in year 10/11.

Therefore, your child will be asked to take part in an online/hard copy survey about PE and Sport. They are free to decide if they want to take part or not and will be asked to give informed consent should they decide to take part. The survey is totally anonymous and confidential.

All data will be anonymised, and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. The data will be destroyed following the end of the project (approx. May 2021). No individual will be able to be identified by the findings.

The survey will take place on \_\_\_\_\_ and will last about 20 minutes.

**Benefits for the Pupils:** This will enhance their knowledge of the research process which will support their academic development as they continue in their studies. The project is purely based on pupil

voice and findings will echo their views, thoughts and opinions. Thus, their views will have an impact on the research debate in this field and potentially future practice.

**Consent:** The school have authorised and consented to participation in this survey. If you feel you do not wish to allow your child to contribute to the survey, please contact \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_ using the following email address \_\_\_\_\_ or telephone number \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you for your cooperation and support of this project.

Yours sincerely,





## Pupil Voices: PE and Sport Survey

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The School is currently involved in a research project with Northumbria University. The project is investigating Physical Education (PE) and sport from the perspective of the child. The whole study is being driven by the voice of the pupils and as part of this we would like to sample wider views of children in year 10.

Your parents and yourselves have been sent a letter with more information about this project. Parents have been given the opportunity to decline your involvement with this survey. If your parent has informed you or your teacher that they do not want you to participate, then please do not fill in this survey. If they have not withdrawn you from participation, then it is entirely up to you whether you complete it or not.

The survey is totally anonymous and confidential, and no individual will be identified by the findings. You are free to decide whether you want to complete this survey or not. If you consent to completing, please continue and thank you for taking part. The survey will last about 15- 20minutes.

## **Appendix 10. Headings in Pre-Study Literature Review**

The headings used in the pre-study literature review were as follows:

*Importance of Sport*

*Significance of School PE*

*Development Factors*

*Barriers to development*

*Ability*

*Health and Obesity*

*Enjoyable engagement in PE*

*Attitudes to PE in Schools*

*Social Class and Sport*

*Sports Clubs and Commercial providers*

*Sport and Identity*

## **Appendix 11. Participants**

### **Participants**

In order to protect the identities of the participants in the focus groups and the interviews labels and pseudonyms were devised for each pupil. For the focus groups they were based upon a lettering system and for the interviews they were given pseudonyms. This differential was to enable clarity when referencing pupils, so it was clear from which forum the quote arose. The questionnaire was completely anonymous and as it involved 154 pupils there was no benefit to adding a label.

### ***Focus Groups***

Six pupils were involved in the focus groups per school, from across the ability range, as defined by the school.

#### ***Independent School (all male)***

Child M

Child O

Child F

Child L

Child G

Child H

#### ***State School (3 male, 3 female)***

Child C - male

Child E - female

Child A - female

Child S - female

Child B - male

Child D - male

### ***Questionnaire Survey***

State School – Year 10 -131/184

Independent School – Year 11- 23/54

### ***Interviews***

Six pupils were interviewed in the independent school and six pupils were interviewed in the state school. In each school three pupils were deemed to be high ability in PE by their school, and three were deemed to be low ability (although this only became apparent if pupils self-identified).

Obviously in the independent school all participants were boys but in the state school there was a mix of gender. Using pseudonyms for the children they were as follows:

*Independent School*

Luke

Oscar

James

Michael

Frank

Gary

*State School*

Ann

Charles

Robert

Elaine

Karen

Edward

***School Labelling***

Although, the study is about children at times it is significant to highlight which school they are from. When this occurs, the following labels are used:

Independent School - IS

State School - SS